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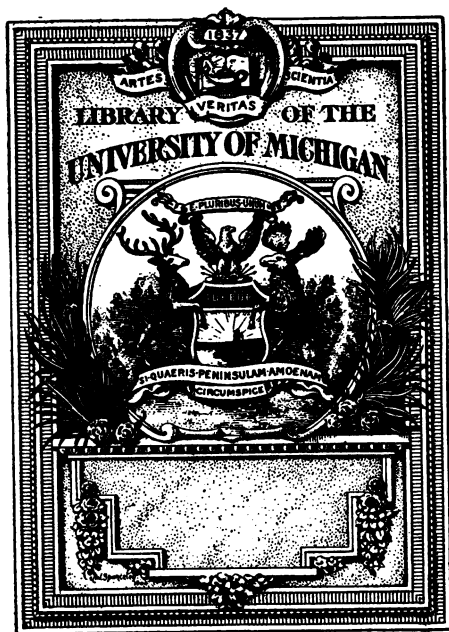
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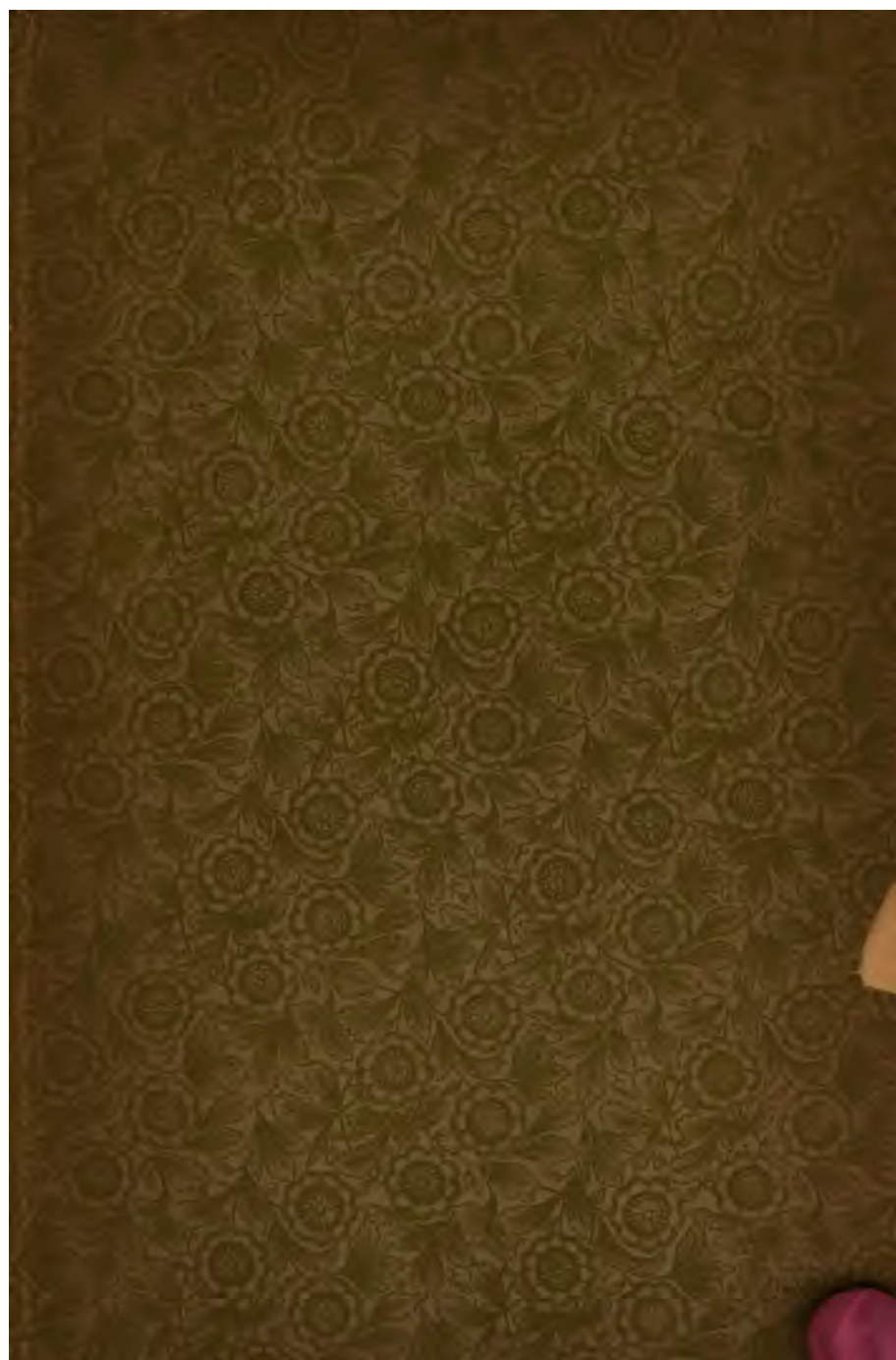
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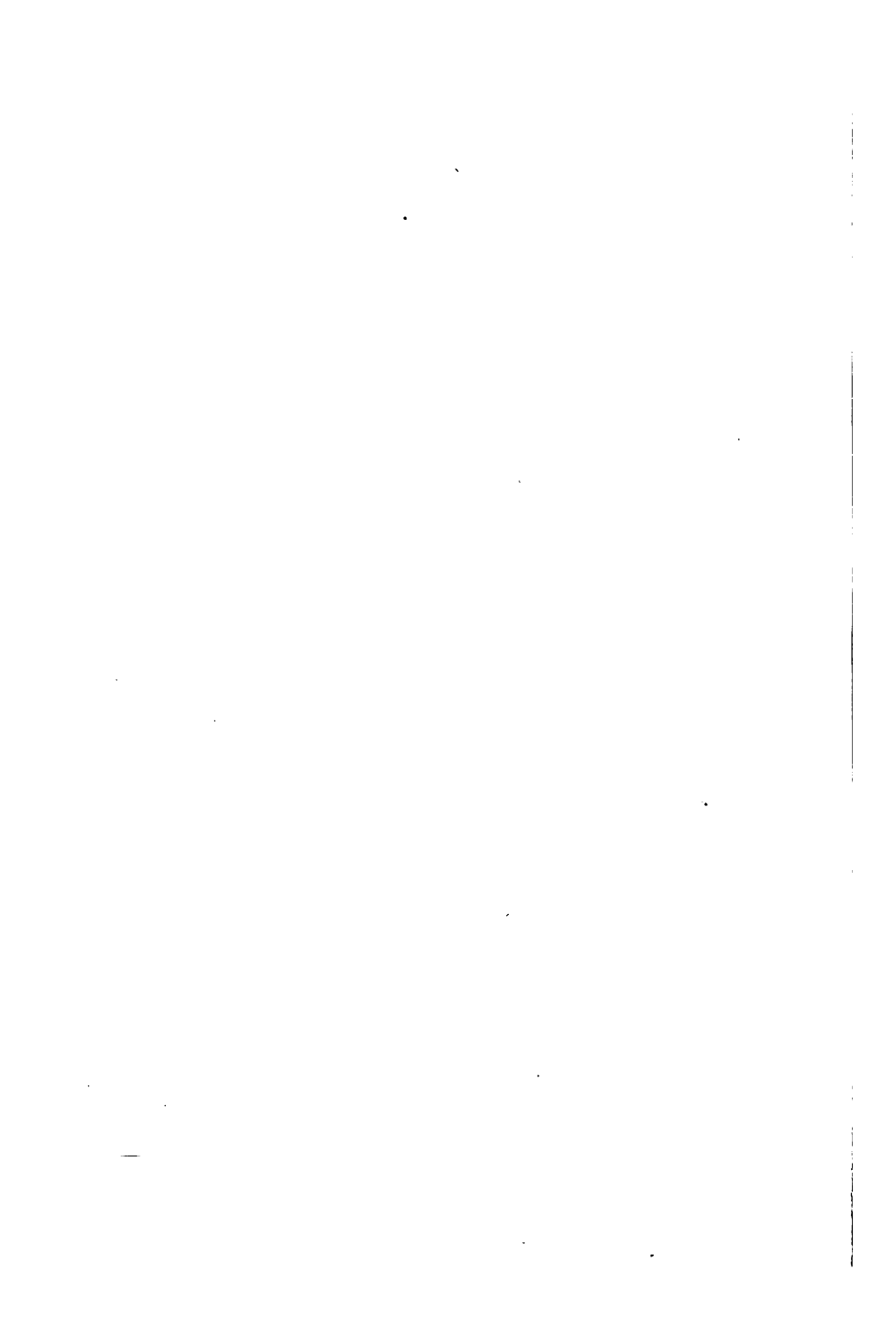




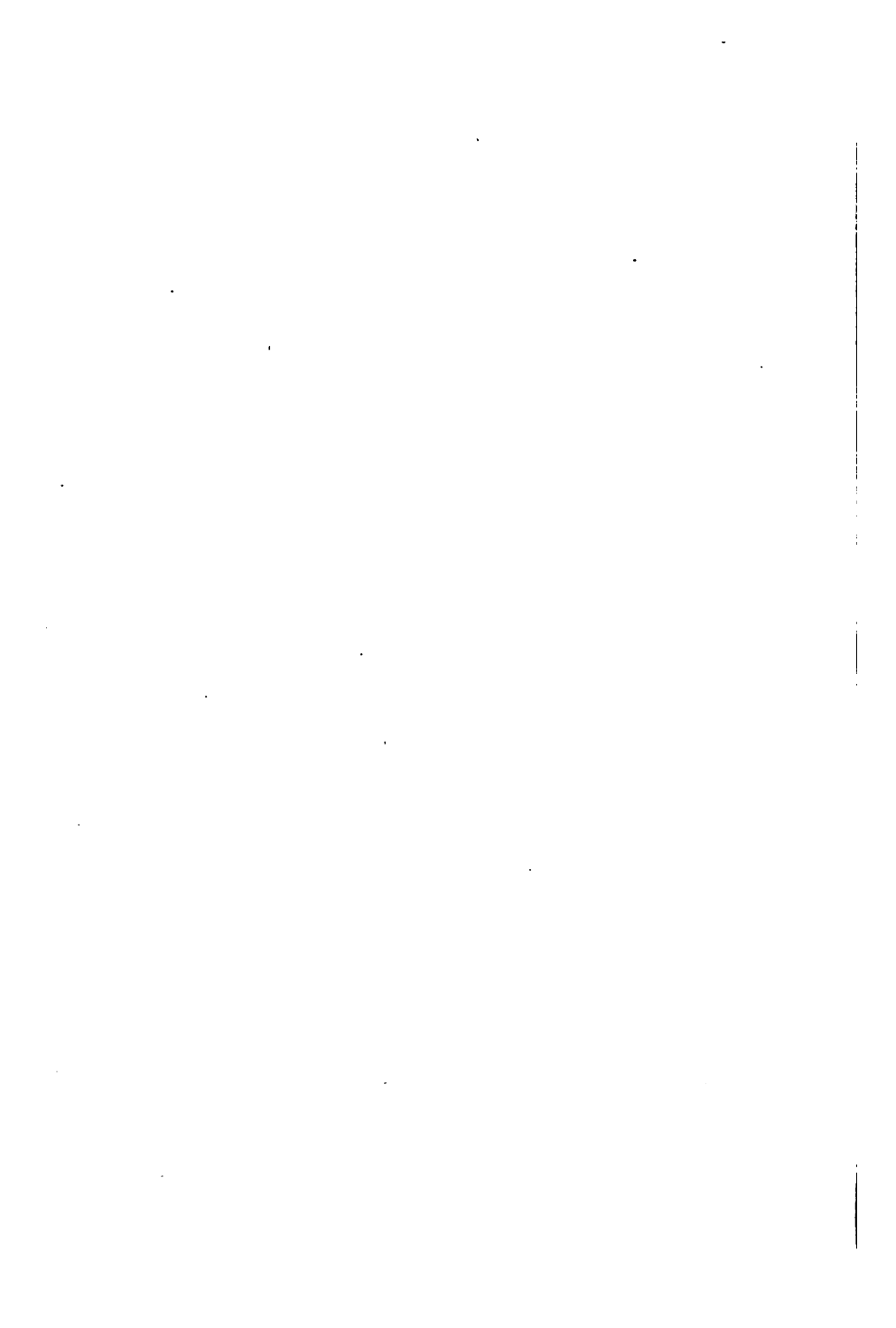


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LAURA RUTHVEN'S WIDOWHOOD



LAURA RUTHVEN'S WIDOWHOOD

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Charles BY
J. WILLS, 1842 -

AUTHOR OF

"THE PIT TOWN CORONET," "JOHN SQUIRE'S SECRET," "IN AND ABOUT
BOHEMIA," ETC.

AND

JOHN DAVIDSON

AUTHOR OF "PERFURVID," "SCARAMOUCH IN NAXOS," ETC.

VOLUME II.

LONDON
LAWRENCE & BULLEN
16 HENRIETTA STREET, COVENT GARDEN, W.C.

1892

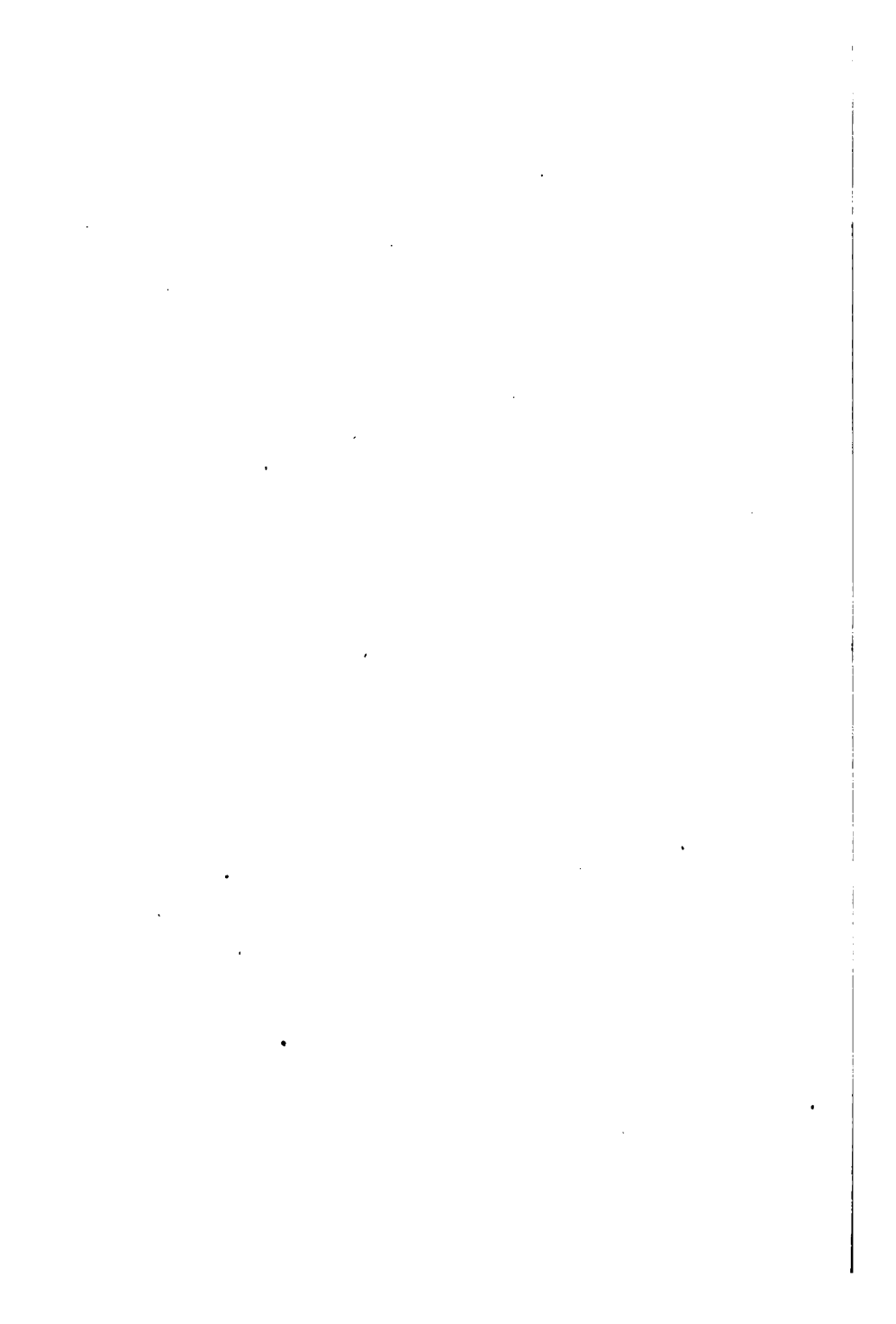
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LAURA RUTHVEN'S WIDOWHOOD.

CHAPTER XII.

PLAYING WITH FIRE.

LAURA RUTHVEN and Charlotte Walton affected no eclecticism in their drives. They went where others went with the greatest pleasure, and they were specially fond of the Dyke Road. On one occasion when returning from the Devil's Dyke, they were startled to see a rider thrown from his horse some hundred yards in advance of their carriage.

"Oh!" sneers the reader; "here's the hero

now! A good old well-established hero, in a good old well-established way, at the beginning of the second volume. Quite so."

As to the way, we have no defence to offer, except that it *is* a good old well-established way, just because accidents of the kind do happen frequently—with varying results. We subjoin a cutting from the Brighton evening paper of the same date as the accident.

"MISHAP TO MR. LEONARD BRANDON.—Our readers will be sorry to learn that this talented young gentleman was thrown from his horse only a few hours ago while riding on the Dyke Road. Mrs. Ruthven of Lexham Gardens, Kensington, was passing in her carriage at the time, and drove Mr. Brandon, who it is feared has sustained serious injury, to her house in Regency Square, where the doctor is afraid Mr. Brandon may be compelled to remain for some time. We trust his fears will be disappointed."

So you see it actually did happen.

As to Mr. Leonard Brandon's being the hero, that, of course, is a matter which only Laura Ruthven can decide. The man whom she chooses to marry will be the hero : she is to be married again in spite of her assertions to the contrary ; we make no secret of that. As we don't think that Laura Ruthven will marry a man unworthy of her, and as we do think that she deserves a specially good husband, we are quite certain that we and the reader will recognise the hero as soon as Laura Ruthven does.

She had plenty of time and unusual opportunity to detect any latent heroic qualities in Mr. Leonard Brandon, for he remained in her house in the capacity of invalid for about a week. Mr. Leonard Brandon had a highly-strung nervous system, and the shock of his fall had upset him considerably, besides which he had sprained his right wrist. During two days he was confined to bed, but on the third the doctor allowed him to come down to the

drawing-room for an hour or two in the afternoon.

With his hand in a black silk handkerchief, Mr. Leonard Brandon presented himself before Laura Ruthven and Charlotte Walton, and was, as an invalid, at once received into favour.

Both ladies had been already struck with his distinguished appearance, but a brief observation of their unexpected guest during the drive home had not led them to anticipate anything so fine as his features or so graceful as his bearing; and, when he spoke, there was a music in his voice to which they had been quite unaccustomed. The most ordinary things were said on both sides; they had tea, and then Mr. Leonard Brandon retired to his room.

"I wonder who he can be!" burst from both ladies.

They compared notes; agreed that he was as certainly a gentleman as he was handsome;

and his age perhaps thirty. Beyond these three points they couldn't get.

"It is very strange that he should not have told us anything about himself," said Laura Ruthven.

"Perhaps there is some mystery about him," suggested her companion.

"I don't think so," rejoined the other; "he will tell us to-morrow, as likely as not."

But he didn't "tell them to-morrow," although he dined with them and did not retire until ten o'clock.

"There is no mystery about him," said Laura Ruthven, when the two ladies were left alone. "He is a gentleman, possibly with an estate in the neighbourhood, or well-known in London, and he imagines that we two poor little ignoramuses know all about him."

"At any rate," said Charlotte Walton, "he is as charming a man as I ever met."

"Take care," said the younger lady, shaking her taper forefinger.

"Now, be honest, Laura, do you not think him a delightful companion?"

"He is certainly very entertaining. Tell me, Charlotte," said Laura Ruthven, musingly, "do you like men's society?"

"Some men's, but I am not one of those who would ogle a draped tailor's block for lack of a more inspired suit of gentlemen's clothes."

"I know, dear; but the men that you do like, do you prefer their company to that of women?"

"I think so; to all women but you, dear."

"And do you have much of men's society?"

"Sometimes."

"But, Charlotte, is that not called flirting?"

"I suppose it is; but there's flirting and flirting; besides, Laura, you mustn't be frightened by mere names, and it takes two to flirt, you know."

Laura Ruthven thought for a second or

two, and then drew herself nearer her companion.

"Is it not dangerous?" she asked in a low voice.

"Is what not dangerous?" queried the other, with a smile lurking about her mouth.

"To make friendships with men?"

"It is; *very* dangerous," replied Charlotte Walton.

"Oh, Charlotte! Why do—"

"For the men," added Charlotte, before Laura could finish her question, and then she laughed.

Again Laura Ruthven, with lowered eyes, thought for a second or two, and again she came nearer to Charlotte Walton before speaking.

"Are you sure it is never dangerous for *you*?" she asked. "Have you never been the least, little, wee bit in love since you became a widow?"

It was Charlotte's turn to think for a second

or two, and she drew very close to Laura, indeed, before replying. When a man is going to make a confession of any kind, he lights a big cigar, goes to the window and looks out, turning his back on his friend. Very likely he sees a man with a donkey, and makes a most original remark about never having beheld a dead one. He will follow the donkey with his eyes as far as he can; and, with his cheek pressed to the window, he will begin, "By-the-bye, talking of dead donkeys—" and in the most casual way something is revealed that makes his friend jump out of his chair. A woman could no more make a confession in that way than she could "shie" a ball high in the air. Of course there are exceptions; some women can and do "shie" balls, and doubtless make confessions in the manner of males; but we speak of the "eternal feminine" without regard to the man-hating amazons of antiquity, or the emulous cricketers of to-day.

Charlotte Walton came very close to Laura

Ruthven, and put her lips to her friend's ear. She thought she was making a confession.

"I have never loved anybody but my husband, and I never shall," she said. "But once or twice I have met men whom I think I could have loved; and one man I did love a little—but it wasn't the same kind of love as I had for my husband; and he saw it and went away. I don't think he loved me, but he liked me."

She thought it was a confession; and it was, in a way; it was simply saying that she was young and human.

"Oh, Charlotte!" said Laura Ruthven. "If he had loved you, and had told you of it, what would you have done?"

"Refused him, dear. But I would never have let it go that length. You will hardly understand this yet, but you will some day."

"And have many men fallen in love with you since you became a widow?"

"One or two; they've pretended to, at least. That's the worst of it for a woman like me. I

like some brains and ideas in a companion. Of course there are women with very wonderful brains and very original ideas, but I couldn't make companions of them—they're not men. You understand what I mean. Men are poor silly fools about us women, you know. If you show them the least kindness and attention they immediately think you have fallen in love with them—even the wisest of them. It's just the Platos, dear, who are incapable of Platonic affection. It makes me quite angry sometimes to think how almost impossible it is for a young woman to make a brother of a man. If he's married it's impossible; his wife doesn't want any sisters of that kind. If he's single he naturally wants to marry, and falls in love with you or somebody else—in either case an end is put to your friendship; or if he doesn't want to marry, he thinks—for men are the vainest creatures—that if he shows an interest in you, you will fall in love with him, and so he puts on an extra high collar to keep his neck stiff, and

sticks to platitudes. Now, dear, don't get angry. I can love my dear husband, and be true to his memory, and yet amuse myself a little sometimes too."

"I'm not angry, Charlotte," said Laura Ruthven, and a fitful frown disappeared as if by magic. "I was only thinking that it must surely be possible for men and women to be on a friendly footing without falling in love with each other."

"Oh, it is possible!" said Charlotte; "but not—well, not with such a man as Mr. Brandon."

"Do you think so?"

"Most certainly."

"But he knows that we are widows."

"But do you know that men imagine that all widows are dying to be married?"

"Surely not."

"You seem to have no idea, Laura dear, how absurd are the opinions about women that men have."

"I'm afraid not," said Laura Ruthven.

"And I repeat no woman could be on any intimate footing with Mr. Brandon without falling in love with him."

"Now that's as absurd as any idea a man could have."

"Oh, you may laugh if you like; but I've observed men, and what I say is true. Before you could be on an intimate footing with Mr. Brandon you would require to shut your eyes to his excessive vanity. He's as conceited about his appearance as a peacock, and as vain of his conversational powers as a parrot that can say grace in English, and swear in Portuguese. And to be blind to that you would require to be in love with him."

"Do you think he's as conceited as that?" asked Laura.

"No, I don't," replied Charlotte, laughing a little; "but he is conceited. Of course all men are conceited."

"Of course," chimed in her companion.

"And most women like them for it," continued Charlotte.

Laura shook her head.

"But," Charlotte went on; "when they cannot hide their satisfaction in the cut of their clothes and the beauty of their voices, we don't like them."

"Now you are very unfair to Mr. Brandon."

"A little, perhaps, for we agreed he was a gentleman."

"Yes, and you said he was as charming a man as you ever met."

"So he is."

"Then, what do you mean?"

"When I find a man charming I always pick out all his faults, and exaggerate them to myself because—you see—"

"Dear Charlotte," said Laura Ruthven, kissing her friend.

"Do you know, I think," said the younger widow, after a pause, "that one could be very

friendly with Mr. Brandon without any danger—to him, I mean.”

“Why not try?”

“How could we try?”

“We’ll see to-morrow,” said Charlotte Walton.

Next day Mr. Brandon came down to lunch, and he drove in the afternoon with the ladies. He was very sprightly and amusing. He seemed to know nearly every town in England and Scotland; and he described with extraordinary *verve* a great variety of characters he had met. Laura Ruthven began to think that he must be a young author. She had some vague remembrance of the name, but she could not recall in what connection. As for Charlotte Walton, we rather think she knew, or had found out, or began to guess, who he was. When the ladies were dressing for dinner, which they always did together, Pinfold dividing her duties with an anxious endeavour to share and share alike, Charlotte said: “Mr.

Brandon was very lively to-day. He seems to me to be almost recovered."

"Almost!" exclaimed Laura, laughing. "If he can drive with us, he could drive to his hotel or his home. We must take his prolonged stay as a compliment, I suppose."

"He paid very particular attention to you, to-day."

"I almost thought so once or twice," said Laura Ruthven, looking a little grave, "but it is merely his manner."

"Certainly, merely his manner—when he is paying particular attention. There are some men, dear, who are always paying particular attention."

As there was no reply to this, Charlotte resumed the conversation by saying, "I think you would find on a trial that there would be *danger* to Mr. Brandon."

"I think you are mistaken," said the other.

Charlotte Walton keeping her own counsel, and the courage of her opinion, determined to

put it to the test; and so after dinner, on some pretext or other, she wickedly left Laura Ruthven and Mr. Leonard Brandon alone together in the drawing-room.

Who was the young gentleman with whom Laura Ruthven was thus forced into a *tête-à-tête*?

Mr. Leonard Brandon was, we blush to own it, a rising actor. He is one of the numerous heroes who have their exits and their entrances in this transcript from life, and in pursuance of our plan we are bound to tell all we know of him. If the reader knows all about Mr. Leonard Brandon already, by skipping a few pages the stale matter may be avoided; at the same time, though Mr. Brandon's life has often been sketched in dramatic publications and the ordinary press, we question if some of our details have ever seen the light before. For example, in no account of him, and we have waded through magazines and newspapers *ad nauseam* in our desire to be

1) accurate—in no publication of the day do we find it stated that Mr. Brandon is a Scotchman. Yet such is the case. There are several eminent actors on the stage at present who have never attempted to conceal their northern origin, who, indeed, may be said to glory in their shame; but to be born and brought up in Scotland is a misfortune—in the eyes of all stage-managers, without exception, a crime, to which few actors have the courage to confess. Alexander Murdoch, *alias* Mr. Leonard Brandon, at an early period in his theatrical career, learned the advisability of hiding his nationality; but we anticipate.

Brandon's father—we shall abide by his professional name—was a gauger or exciseman in the fair city of Perth. He gave his son an ordinary school education, and then offered him his choice between his own occupation and a profession. The youth chose the profession—that of medicine—and was sent to Aberdeen University. There he joined a dramatic club

and soon distinguished himself. The press praised his acting as Charles Surface at a charity performance; and all his companions, most of them anxious to get rid of his overshadowing presence in their club, advised him warmly to adopt the stage as his profession. Armed with an influential introduction, he called on the local manager, and gave him an exhibition of his powers in scenes from *Macbeth* and *Much Ado About Nothing*. The manager approved. "You have a good voice," he said, "if you only knew how to manage it, a fair stage presence, and some idea of gesture." He explained to Brandon what he knew already, that the days of provincial stock-companies were over, and that he would have to travel. "As you want to start at once," said the friendly manager, "you should apply to 'utility' advertisements in the *Era*." The ingenuous youth did not see how that was to benefit him, as he had no references. "That's of small consequence," said the manager; "date

your applications from my theatre, and refer to me." Had he a wardrobe? No; the dresses he had appeared in belonged to the club. Then he must get some. He couldn't afford it. Well, he could get a pair of tights at least, and if he received an appointment he could explain that he had been hard-up and had to dispose of his wardrobe. Actors were good fellows, and would lend him a rag or two, until he could get together a stock of his own. He would have to work very hard at first, much harder after a little, and at last, hardest of all.

"Was not this plan a species of deception?"

"Young man," said the manager, "do you wish to start immediately?"

"Certainly."

"Then I know of no other way than this. You have come to me for advice; I tell you the only possible way, as you are situated, to get one foot on the boards. I do not bid you follow my advice. It has been

followed, however, and has succeeded." The young man would follow it. "If," continued the stage-manager—"if you fail to get a start in this way, I will give you an introduction to Boanerges Bawler, who 'opens' in Newcastle in about a month." He would prefer to wait till then; it would be a splendid start, to begin in Boanerges Bawler's company. "I advise you not to wait till then," said the manager; "I can't guarantee you a place in his company. Apply at once through the *Era*, and take whatever offers—a booth-theatre, a penny-gaff—I began as a barnstormer, and good training it was. We acted everything—any amount of Shakespeare; he doesn't 'spell ruin' in a penny-gaff. But remember, it requires a totally different style of acting from the legitimate boards—and, I think, in some respects a better style." All men, even managers, have their hobbies, and young Brandon's mentor had got mounted, "boot, saddle, to horse, and away!" "I'll show you what I

mean," he continued, rising and making space for himself in a corner of the room. "You know Jaques' famous speech, 'All the World's a Stage'? Well, here's the legitimate style."

The manager recited what he called "Jaques' sophistical oration" in the accepted manner—that is to say, as if it were a new gospel. He began in tones' of awful solemnity, which changed when he came to the infant into a high falsetto; and from that cracked note he descended gradually through the schoolboy, the lover, and the soldier, to the deep grumbling voice of the justice; then he rose through the slippered pantaloons to the quavering notes of second childhood, ending up in the same awful tones in which he had begun, with four distinct double shakes of the head on "Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste"—a pause, and he looked the theatre up and down, from the orchestra to the "gods" and back; then slowly, "sans everything." Of course he didn't omit to tickle the baby in the nurse's arms; nor did he fail to

make the regulation expansive gesture at "the justice in fair round belly with good capon lined"—as if capon were worn on the outside as a sort of judicial dress-improver !

"That," said the manager with dignity, "is the legitimate method ; and—for your instruction, you understand, I know my own deficiencies well enough—a rendering that has been much admired. I will show you"—and he plunged into a cupboard and pulled forth an album of press-cuttings—"some notices when I travelled with Bawler ; he was younger then, and used to play Orlando, to his wife's Rosalind. Jaques was my celebrated part. In this very town, in the very theatre I now manage, an unprecedented thing happened. I was encored twice in that speech. Bawler was furious, but the audience insisted. It was very absurd, of course, very ; but, there it is in black and white."

Young Brandon read the notice with interest, and saw that it had been as the manager said.

"And now," resumed the manager, "I will show you how to recite the same speech in the booths."

Clenching his right hand, and raising it high above his head, he brought down his arm with a slow, involved movement, and stiffened it suddenly at an angle of forty-five degrees from the shoulder, on the word "stage." This gesture, modified sometimes by having the hand open, and by an occasional sweep of the arm in front of him, pulled him right through to the last line in a loud, ranting voice. Instead of the quartette of double shakes, at the conclusion, he held his head stiffly back, and sent his clenched hand straight up into the air three times on the three phrases, "Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste"; and upon "sans everything," he flourished his open palm thrice above his head, as if in token that some great victory had been won.

"That," said the manager, having recovered his breath, "is how I used to bring down the

booth on Glasgow Green at fair-time. Now, which of these styles do you like best?"

Brandon, as he was expected to do, replied that he preferred the legitimate manner.

"I think you're wrong," said the manager; "and I'll tell you why. There's not an actor of any intelligence who plays Jaques who does not determine to depart entirely from the conventional in that speech. A very slight study of it convinces him that it is quite wrong to deliver it like a sermon by a popular preacher, terribly solemn and earnest, with a joke thrown in here and there. And what's the reason of that, do you think?"

Brandon shook his head.

"It's because it's not true. After 'To be or not to be,' 'All the world's a stage,' are the words of Shakespeare's writing most widely known and quoted, and believed generally to be the most Shakespearian, and yet their philosophy is altogether false. Do you believe it? Do you believe that all men are mere

players—that nobody's in earnest? Why, I know no class of people more in earnest than actors themselves! Do you think that life consists of nothing but squalling in a nurse's arms, being whipped at school, falling in love, fighting, putting people in prison, saving money and dying? Do you think Shakespeare believed it? Do you think Jaques himself believed it? Not he; Jaques was a *roué* and an agnostic, that's what Jaques was; he didn't believe anything; he had wasted his life and had never really enjoyed it, and so he said in very fine language, 'The grapes are sour;' but Shakespeare knew that love was more than writing sonnets, education more than going to school, and that a man could employ his time to better purpose than in merely acquiring a reputation, on the battlefield or anywhere else; and I say that every intelligent actor who plays Jaques knows that, and yet he has got to speak that speech as if it were a gospel. Mind you, I know as well as anybody that it's magnificent

literature and magnificent dramatically — if Jaques were only allowed to speak it in character. But he daren't; the audience imagines that these are Shakespeare's own words and ideas, and the actor has got to play Shakespeare instead of Jaques in that speech. There's not an actor of intelligence who has played Jaques who has not begged on his knees to be allowed to change the tone, but no manager will hear of it: I wouldn't. At the third line the audience would rise as one man, hiss the actor off the stage, and then wreck the theatre. You may play Hamlet in a kilt, and Richard III. without a limp, but Jaques' speech is the law and the prophets."

"How would you wish it played, then?" asked young Brandon.

"In this way," said the manager, getting up and leaning over his chair. "Jaques, you know, is simply Mercutio gone wrong, and so this is how he would talk that sophistry;" and the manager delivered for the third time the famous speech.

He spoke it as a polished gentleman might after dinner, "with good emphasis and discretion." He was simply airing his eloquence on the favourite theme of the disappointed man from Solomon downwards. "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity."

Young Brandon thanked the manager for his advice, for the entertainment and instruction he had given him, took away the current *Era*, and sent off several applications. By an almost unexampled piece of good luck, one of the advertisers replied at once, and Leonard Brandon became a professional actor in a third-class provincial company at twenty shillings a week. Finding himself at the end of a few months in the neighbourhood of London, he said good-bye to his country friends, and came to try his luck in the city of theatres. He had an introduction to a celebrated actor. At the time of young Brandon's arrival in London this actor, whom we will call Mr. Harold Timbrell, was organ-

ising for Lady Edith Sommerville, a company to give open-air representations of Shakespeare. Mr. Timbrell was much struck with Brandon's appearance, and with the exquisite quality of his sympathetic voice. So was Lady Edith Sommerville when she saw him ; and he was received into her company. When Lady Edith's season was over young Brandon gaily and hopefully set about obtaining a permanent London appointment. He had rather distinguished himself in the *al-fresco* performances ; the press had hailed him as of some promise ; and he had Mr. Timbrell's recommendation, and Lady Edith's influence behind him ; but he couldn't find an open door anywhere. In two months' time he was reduced to his last thirty shillings. It was autumn when he found himself in this predicament, and young Brandon liked comfort. He had no intention of going back to a pound a week in the provinces ; besides he felt that it would be an injustice

to himself and to his country—for he had developed a mighty opinion of his future—were he to risk the fine quality of his voice by a winter of privation. Therefore with twenty-five shillings he bought a third-class excursion ticket to Perth, and his father and mother received him with open arms, having become reconciled to his choice of a career.

In Perth, on the North Inch, where the famous clan-battle was fought, and where Mr. Ruskin played when he was a little boy and watched the pebbles under the clear waters of the Tay, Mr. Leonard Brandon meditated on his past and on his future with profit to himself. He came to the conclusion that he had enemies, and adopted the following not by any means novel *ruse*. Hitherto he had been known by his own name; now he took his *nom de theatre*. He advertised in the *Era* that Mr. Leonard Brandon “was resting;” he printed his testimonials and press notices over again in a beautiful little pam-

phlet on hand-made Dutch paper ; and he replied to the advertisement of the manager of a leading Shakespearian company which played in London during the winter and spring, and in the provinces in the summer. The company was in Edinburgh at the time Mr. Leonard Brandon was in Perth "resting"; it was easier to see Mr. Brandon than any of the other likely applicants ; Mr. Brandon was seen, and Mr. Brandon was engaged as "utility" at two-pound-ten a week. It was a down-come from his high-pitched dreams of a month before ; but he had made up his mind to begin at the bottom of the ladder again. At least he started under better auspices than on his former venture.

At the first rehearsal he attended—the play was *The Midsummer Night's Dream*, and Mr. Brandon was cast for Egeus—a certain matter was made clear to him, and he knew the cause of his former failure to obtain employment.

His first speech consisted of one line:

"Happy be Theseus, our renowned Duke."

He got through that all right. His second speech was a long one of over twenty lines, a test speech, and he was determined to distinguish himself. He began in his best old man's style.

"Full of vexation come I, with complaint
Against my child, my daughter, Hermia"—

"Eh!" interjected the manager with considerable surprise, "begin again, Mr. Brandon."

Mr. Brandon, equally surprised, began again, and was stopped by the manager exactly at the same place.

"Sir," said the manager with a fierce gesture, "you're a Scotchman! You're a Scotchman, sir, don't deny it! You are!"

"I never attempted to conceal it," said Mr. Brandon, rather timidly.

"You can't conceal it," said the manager ;
"but you didn't mention it, and it's not in your
papers. And do you know, sir, that the man
you have succeeded had just been weeded out,
as a Scotchman ?"

Mr. Leonard Brandon was not without pluck ;
so he said, "I was not aware of that. I will
finish my week with you and then *weed* myself
out. In the meantime will you kindly tell me
how you know I'm a Scotchman."

"I will," said the manager, somewhat molli-
fied by the young man's attitude. "You said :

"Full of vexation come I, with complaint
Against my child, my *dotter*, Hermia'"—

"I didn't," said young Brandon hotly.

"It wasn't quite so bad as that," rejoined the
manager with a laugh ; "but it was in the word
'daughter' I recognised your Scotch tongue,
your accursed speech, your unfortunate nation-
ality. I hope you will keep a watch over your-
self,"

Mr. Leonard Brandon did take care, and at the end of the week when he called on the manager to fulfil his promise of weeding himself out, he was requested to remain. From that time Mr. Brandon's career was all plain sailing. He soon found himself in London again, and in a few years arrived at his present eminent position.

To resume the thread of our narrative : it was more than Mr. Leonard Brandon had hoped for, it was what he ardently desired, to be left alone with Laura Ruthven for half-an-hour. From which remark and the following chapter the reader will gather whether Charlotte Walton or Laura Ruthven had formed the more correct idea of Mr. Brandon's character.

CHAPTER XIII.

A MODERN LOVER.

MR. LEONARD BRANDON wasn't a bad fellow at heart ; he had begun making love professionally, first as a "walking gentleman," when he had perforce to confine his attentions to the utility ladies ; but as he gradually rose in the profession of his choice, and at length became a "leading man," his duties in the love-making line grew more arduous ; and as he was a thoroughly conscientious actor, and never spared himself, he had almost attained perfection in what may be termed spooning as a fine art. He had begun by making love ; he had ended by having love habitually made to him. It wasn't his fault that his photograph was always exhibited outside the box-office at the

particular theatre at which he might happen to be engaged ; that was the manager's business, not his. Just as the counterfeit presentiment of Miss Tottie Slyboots, all eyes, and curls, and ogles, was hung out, as a sort of catch-'em-alive-O, to attract "the mashers and the chappies," so did astute managers hang up great photographs of Leonard Brandon, for the benefit of womankind generally and the sex at large, which we know upon good authority to be uncertain, coy, and hard to please. Just as the men went to stare at that pert perennial syren, Miss Slyboots, so did all sorts and conditions of women pay for their seats, or cause their husbands, lovers, or fathers to pay for them, in order to see that particularly good-looking young gentleman, Mr. Leonard Brandon. Ask a photographer, he'll tell you that he sells very nearly as many Brandons as he does Slyboots. It wasn't Brandon's fault that he was the glass of fashion and the mould of form, and being a good-hearted young

fellow, he wasn't really vain of his personal advantages; they were merely a portion of his stock-in-trade, and consequently worth so many pounds a week to him. It has been said that Brandon as an actor was above the average; but it must be reluctantly confessed that if it hadn't been for his great personal beauty, he would still have been starving in "the provinces," instead of wearing purple and fine linen, and being a popular favourite, and what used to be known as a curled darling, in the metropolis. He had got rid of his Scotch accent, but he couldn't get rid of his Scotch nature; the dream of young Brandon's life was to marry money. He had had two or three chances of marrying money. Old Mrs. Doublechins, the lessee of five large provincial theatres, had offered him her large hand, her still larger heart, and the vacant place in her affections; but Brandon looked higher than Mrs. Doublechins. He wanted to marry money; but he was determined that his wife should at

least look like a lady, and Mrs. Doublechins didn't look a bit like a lady: even when she played Pauline, she was merely a tremendous apparition, and she played Pauline to his Claude. Quite early in his career, Lady Edith Sommerville had proposed to him—we use the term advisedly; but though she was a lady, and talented, she had no money, and she lived by her wits.

Now Mrs. Ruthven appealed both to his feelings as a man and his feelings as a Scotchman. Mr. Brandon, during his short stay in Regency Square, had ascertained that the big landau and pair, in which the fair Samaritans had brought him home after his accident, was Mrs. Ruthven's own property; the presence, too, of Clooper reassured him; a widow who keeps a butler and a landau and pair must be both wealthy and respectable: that butler, who was a particularly fine, old, crusted butler, by the way, gave Laura Ruthven a sort of halo in Mr. Brandon's eyes; we know that keeping

a gig means respectability ; and a landau and pair and a butler, to the mind of the ingenuous young actor, conveyed Consols.

Brandon, as he walked into the drawing-room and caught Mrs. Ruthven alone for the first time, determined to try his luck, and, as he would have phrased it, "make up to the little widow at once."

"You've been awfully good to me, Mrs. Ruthven, and I hardly know how to express my gratitude," he began.

"You've very little to be grateful for, Mr. Brandon," replied the lady. "We were the cause of Humpty Dumpty's fall, and the least we could do was to pick Humpty Dumpty up again."

Brandon had never been compared to Humpty Dumpty in his life before ; it wasn't a promising beginning.

"Yes, that's all very well," replied the man whose business in life it was to make love becomingly ; "but you might have deposited

Humpty Dumpty at the nearest chemist's shop. I shall never forget your kindness to my dying day," he went on; "there are some things, Mrs. Ruthven," he continued in his very best manner, "there are some things, Mrs. Ruthven, that a man never can forget—not if he have a heart."

"You take it too seriously, Mr. Brandon," said the lady.

"One has to take things seriously in this sad world," he said; here he rolled his eyes, as he was accustomed to do when he wanted to point a particularly pointless phrase. "Yes, Mrs. Ruthven, it is a sad world, this little world of ours; I've found it so, and you too, or I mistake me, must have found it sad. But Hope's bright lodestar ever illuminated our path through this—this—this—"

"Vale of tears," suggested Mrs. Ruthven.

"Thanks awfully, it wasn't the exact phrase I wanted, but it's a pretty phrase all the same, as any phrase would be falling from such lips

as yours." Here he made a little bow, and smiled to show his perfect teeth becomingly.

"It's not my phrase, Mr. Brandon, it's the Reverend Mr. Stiggins's."

"I don't go much to church, Mrs. Ruthven," said Brandon, running his white hand through his luxuriant curls, and causing his ring to flash. "I haven't time, you see, for I work hard, and Sunday is my only off-day."

Now Mrs. Ruthven hadn't the slightest idea of the nature of Mr. Brandon's occupation. Till now she had looked upon him as a harmless member of the ornamental classes, and it was rather a blow to the gentleman to find that his fame, as a thing of beauty and a joy forever, had not reached her ears as yet.

Members of the theatrical profession have a trick of talking in blank verse. Mrs. Siddons did it, as we all know. Why, when the call-boy brought her a foaming pot of porter, instead of the glass of water she had asked for, did she not electrify him by saying, "I

asked for water, boy : you've brought me beer ;" which is distinctly blank verse, and no doubt would have impressed any ordinary boy very much, though the call-boy, being a theatrical boy, and raised, so to say, in an atmosphere of gas and orange peel, and, shall we say, blank verse, probably took it as a matter of course, and may even have been in the habit of conversing in blank verse himself.

"I'm but a poor player, Mrs. Ruthven," said Brandon, "and your palatial home seems to me like cloud-capped towers and gorgeous palaces ; while the evidences of luxury and wealth I see around appal and humble me. Till I saw you I thought—I thought my heart was dead ; but—no man can say his heart—his heart is dead until within his breast that heart has ceased to beat."

"I don't quite see how," began Mrs. Ruthven.

"I know what you're going to say," broke

in Brandon, "it's a common reflection, but it's a beautiful sentiment all the same; and we mustn't take things always by the sense but by the sound, dear lady. As I was saying, I thought my heart was dead till I met you, and now it wildly beats within my breast. Pardon me, but I must say my say, and speak to you my plain unvarnished tale. I love you, madam," (here he rose,) "and 'tis my heart that speaks, which beats within my breast as it has never beat before. Oh, Charlotte, Charlotte, why does the very sound of your dear name—"

"But my name doesn't happen to be Charlotte, Mr. Brandon," said Mrs. Ruthven, with an amused laugh.

"Of course not, I was mixing you up a bit; but it doesn't matter, indeed it don't. What's in a name? A rose by any other name would smell as sweet. Mrs. Ruthven," he continued in an awful voice, which seemed to come from about the third button of his waistcoat, "I will not dissemble, I have loved you long and pas-

sionately, and for years, because—because, Mrs. Ruthven, you are the woman of my dreams. When, in the course of my professional avocations, I seemed to speak burning words of love to others, they were addressed to my ideal; they were spoken to you, to the woman I had never seen, save with the eye of fancy, and in the visionary watches of the night. Mrs. Ruthven, have you a heart?"

"Of course, I've got a heart, Mr. Brandon; every woman has; but I may not like being laughed at, all the same. I don't think that what *you* would call 'Ercles vein' quite suits you."

"Madam," said Brandon, reseating himself, "I will roar you as gently as any sucking dove; I will roar you, an't were any nightingale."

Mrs. Ruthven couldn't resist it. "Bless thee, Bottom! bless thee! thou art translated," she cried; and then she laughed and clapped her hands merrily.

The clapping of hands is always very dear indeed to an actor's ears, but the cruel comparison to Bottom the weaver cut Mr. Brandon to the very soul: nobody had ever likened him to Bottom before. In his own mind, and in that of the greater portion of the female British public, the only thing in which he resembled Bottom was that he was "a most lovely, gentleman-like man."

"Bottom be—" He was going to say blowed, but he thought the word would sound badly in Romeo's mouth. "He isn't in my line, Mrs. Ruthven, he isn't in my line a bit," he went on; "some of our big stars have taken him on, notably Phelps, but to tell you the truth I shouldn't care myself even to touch Bottom with a pair of tongs, and hang it, when you laughed you hurt my feelings."

"And have you no thought of *my* feelings, Mr. Brandon?" said Mrs. Ruthven, with an air of seriousness by which Mr. Brandon was thoroughly deceived. "Do you think I like

being laughed at? Why, I've only known you three days, and you laugh at me by pretending to make love to me in mock heroics. Oh, Mr. Brandon, you shouldn't, you really shouldn't, you shouldn't trifle with a woman's feelings."

"I wasn't trifling, my dear madam, I really wasn't, I assure you," cried Brandon. "I was only trying to—well—um—put it poetically: but I mean it, I really do mean it, indeed I do. I never was more serious in my life. And hang it, you know, a fellow's got a right to be taken seriously when he's making a formal offer of his heart and hand. Mine, Mrs. Ruthven, is, let me tell you, a position that half the prettiest women in London are dying to share."

"It's a very tempting offer, of course, Mr. Brandon," said Laura Ruthven; "but I don't quite see what it is you're offering to share with me."

"My salary, madam," said Mr. Brandon a little sadly, "is sixty pounds a week. You are wealthy—"

"It's very good of you to say so, Mr. Brandon but suppose I were to tell you, that were I to marry again I should lose every farthing I had in the world."

"That would be taking the guilt off the gingerbread with a vengeance," replied Mr. Brandon.

"I am the gingerbread, I suppose," said Mrs. Ruthven with a smile; "I am sure I'm very much obliged to you."

"That wasn't exactly what I meant," replied Brandon; "but I'll tell you what it is, we've both had a very lucky escape. When I come to think of it," and the national canniness here came uppermost once more, "I don't think you are quite the sort of woman for a mummer's wife, Mrs. Ruthven; you've a prepossessing personal appearance, you know, but you're deficient in physique, and you are not thick-skinned enough. An actor's wife should be as strong as a horse, and a regular pachyderm, a kind of human rhinoceros, but of course of pleasing appearance. But I'm awfully indebted

to you. Gad, I really am! Why, any other woman in your position would have jumped at it at once. And now, Mrs. Ruthven, I think I ought to say good-bye, because I feel that I am only wasting your time—and my own,” he added, with a dash of pathos. “And it was awfully good of you, you know, to pick me up out of the gutter as you did, and I hope you and your friend will come and have a look at me whenever you like; you’ve only to send your card round from the box-office and say you’re a friend of Mr. Brandon’s, and I’ll see that you get a box, or a couple of stalls at the very least. It was very near being a case of out of the frying-pan into the fire for both of us, wasn’t it? and, by Jove, do you know, Mrs. Ruthven, I think I may as well give you back this handkerchief, for my arm seems pretty well all right now.” And then Mr. Brandon took off the black silk sling, folded it up carefully, patted it, and then handed it back to Mrs. Ruthven with a bow and a flourish.

And that was the last that Laura Ruthven saw of "Beautiful Brandon ;" but it wasn't by any means the last she heard of him. When Mr. Leonard Brandon created a new part he was in the habit of sending his favourable notices to his friends ; and for two or three years he favoured Laura Ruthven in this way ; perhaps with the object of showing her what she had lost.

But we are bound in justice to Mrs. Ruthven to confess that she remained perfectly heart-whole, and that she didn't even buy a copy of Mr. Leonard Brandon in trunk hose and a cavalier wig, which at that particular time might have been seen occupying a prominent position in every stationer's shop window in Brighton.

As for Brandon himself, when he and his professional friends were regaling each other with whisky and water and accounts of their *bonnes fortunes*, he would say, "Ah, Jack, dear boy, I had a precious narrow squeak of it down at Brighton. I nearly made an ass of myself ;

I was within an ace of blasting my magnificent future by marrying a little widow with eyes like stars, and pots of money ; she kept a butler and a landau and pair, by Gad, she did, and she saved my life, sir ; and I was uncommonly near marrying that little puss out of gratitude. But hang it, you know, Jack, money ain't everything in this world, and what a man like me looks for in a woman is poetry and points ; her points were all right, but hang it, Jack, she was sadly deficient in poetry."

With the exception of the episode of Mr. Brandon, there was nothing, during our heroine's long stay at the queen of British watering places, to disturb the quiet even tenor of that lady's life. Laura Ruthven and her friend day by day grew fonder of each other ; and what with the bracing air and the cheerful appearance of things generally, time never seemed to hang too heavy on the ladies' hands. Mrs. Croft came down for a week, which wasn't, perhaps, an unmixed pleasure,

but still in Brighton there's always something going on, and the first six months of Laura Ruthven's widowhood soon passed away. "Heartless creature!" cries the lady reader, perhaps a widow herself, still perchance wearing the customary aspect of solemn grief, one whose tears time has as yet failed to dry. But then, dear lady, you are probably not under the impression that your dead husband was a—shall we say—star-breasted villain; whereas Mrs. Ruthven had tried and by this time almost succeeded in banishing the memory of John Ruthven of Austin Friars from her mind; you can't go on loving a dead husband, you know, when you have learned to despise him.

And then came spring and the tourist season; and then Mrs. Ruthven did what all wise and wealthy people invariably do, she left Brighton and returned to town.

CHAPTER XIV.

JEZEBEL AND THE DEACON.

"LADY FULLALOVE!" exclaimed Laura Ruthven, taking a card from the salver which Clooper extended towards her with professional respect mingled with professional dignity.

"And who may Lady Fullalove be?" asked Charlotte Walton.

It was the second day after their return to town, and our heroine and her companion sat in their own little—they called it little—snuggery, anticipating and desiring a visit least of all things.

"I know only this about her," Laura Ruthven replied to her friend; "my husband mentioned her in his will. If it weren't for

that, I think I would plead a headache ; but I suppose I must see her."

Charlotte Walton scanned her friend carefully. She had seen occasion more than once to revise her first and natural idea of Laura Ruthven's grief and frequent fits of melancholy. Charlotte felt that if *her* husband had mentioned Lady Fullalove in his will, she would have been only too happy to see her and welcome her with open arms. What could be wrong with Laura Ruthven, or what could have been wrong with John Ruthven that his widow should be so indifferent to one whom he had liked? She watched Laura attentively, and saw that she was not simply irritated at being disturbed. Her disinclination to see her husband's friend had evidently a deeper root than that ; and Charlotte Walton felt aggrieved because some secret was being withheld from her.

"Oh, Laura!" she said reproachfully, "you ought to go."

"I suppose so ; and I will ;" said Laura Ruthven, wearily.

Laura Ruthven loved Charlotte Walton with all her heart, but apart from the positive qualities that attracted her to her friend, Charlotte had a negative quality that would have gone far to compensate for a few disagreeable amenities of person or character. Charlotte Walton had never known nor heard of John Ruthven until he was dead ; and she was therefore quite unable to torment Laura with his praise. It was a great comfort and repose to her in her misery to think that her friend had not been a witness to her happy wedded life—happiness built on a quicksand ! They had been gossiping leisurely about their schooldays, when Lady Fullalove was announced. Laura Ruthven's fancy had been far away ; her mind at perfect rest. Her visitor's name recalled the immediate past. She would doubtless be required once more to listen to the eulogy of her husband, to acquiesce in it, silently at least,

if she were to keep her secret. We cannot wonder that she thought for a moment of a way of escape ; but there was none, so she went to the drawing-room.

Her reception of Lady Fullalove was as cold as civility would permit ; but that great, if not perfect, letter-writer shook off the frigid welcome as if it had been a flake or two of snow, and sitting down close beside Laura Ruthven, began to talk in the warmest tone.

"I've always longed to know the wife of my dear old friend," she said. "Somehow or other we have never met ; but we shall be great friends now, shall we not ?"

"Have we never met ?" said Laura Ruthven, gazing intently at her visitor. "I think I have seen you, but I cannot remember where."

"Oh ! you may have seen me in a hundred places !" rejoined Lady Fullalove, in a tone which meant and "once seen, I'm not easily forgotten."

"Yes, I'm certain I've seen you before," said Laura Ruthven, still fixing a piercing glance on Lady Fullalove. "I shall doubtless remember where in a little while."

"Your husband may have pointed me out to you."

"No, he never did that," replied Laura, decidedly. "My husband must have been attached to you," she added.

Laura had turned as white as a ghost. She began to think she knew who Lady Fullalove was.

"Oh! we were very fond of each other. He was a very remarkable man was John Ruthven. He had a wonderful wealth of affection in his nature that few knew of; and he had broader views than most men."

"On love and marriage, for example," said Laura Ruthven, shaking with excitement.

"No; there, I think, if you will pardon me, he was a little behind the age."

"In practice or in theory?" asked Laura.

Her brain was blazing and her eyes too, though her cheek still kept its deathly pallor. She felt certain, now, that she knew who Lady Fullalove was.

"How—how cogently you put it!" exclaimed Lady Fullalove, looking curiously at Laura Ruthven. "In both theory and practice I think Mr. Ruthven came short of the highest standard."

Lady Fullalove meant to continue, but Laura Ruthven again interjected a question with feverish haste. She had before her the face of the photograph—of that there was no doubt; but she wanted to make assurance doubly sure, and force the writer of the letters to reveal her vile character in her speech. Laura Ruthven was beginning her revenge, as she thought.

"What is the highest standard of conduct in love and marriage?" she asked.

"My dear Mrs. Ruthven," said Lady Fullalove deprecatingly, "you must see that it is

not a question of conduct ; or perhaps you cannot quite grasp the idea of that morality which transcends morality, and can do exactly what it pleases, because it can never go wrong ; and yet I should not have imagined the widow of John Ruthven to be wanting in a knowledge of those matters."

"My ideas of love and marriage," rejoined Laura Ruthven tartly, "are of the old-fashioned order to which I *supposed* my husband's also belonged."

"They did in a measure, I am sorry to say. But why should we discuss these subjects? Your husband and I almost quarrelled about them, and it is not likely that you and I will agree ; so we had better leave them alone. In one thing we *can* both agree, and that is in loving the memory of John Ruthven. Let that be the bond between us, my dear Mrs. Ruthven—my dear Laura, for we must be the closest friends now."

"Your kindness, Lady Fullalove," began

Laura in a low tone, trembling with passion ; but her visitor interrupted her.

“Don’t call me Lady Fullalove ; call me Marcia,” she said feelingly.

Although Laura Ruthven after a few minutes’ talk with Lady Fullalove had been perfectly aware of her identity with Marcia, it was only when that remarkable woman invited her to address her by her Christian name that she grasped fully the fact that there stood before her the writer of the letters which had so dislocated her life. The moment which she had wished, which she had prayed for, had come, but instead of the angry joy she had expected to feel, a sickening sense of impotence almost prostrated her. She had often—you see she was little more than a girl, and it would have been excusable in a much older person—she had often imagined this meeting, and the withering speech with which she would silence Marcia and blanch her cheek. But this woman was impenetrable ; she was emancipated, and

sin was not sin to her. To make her suffer would be impossible ; if with some special probe she managed to reach for an instant the choked fountain of shame, or should twitch by accident a nerve of her overweening vanity, it would be all she could hope for.

“Marcia,” began Laura Ruthven, “Marcia—” She could get no further.

“What is it, dear Laura?” asked Lady Fullalove tenderly. “Are you ill? You are trembling.”

Laura Ruthven’s rage became boundless. To see this tall handsome woman talking freely of her relations with the dead man, patronising her kindly, and all with perfect self-possession, while she, the injured wife, could not utter a word for the furious beating of her heart and the wild turmoil of her ideas, drove her positively mad for a second or two. She rose and wrung her hands: then she passed her fingers over her face with a helpless gesture, and sank down sobbing.

Lady Fullalove ran to her at once.

"My poor child!" she said, placing an arm about her neck.

Laura Ruthven, starting up, cried, "Don't touch me; don't dare to touch me."

A few tears had given her relief, and she was more mistress of herself.

"How have I offended you?" asked Lady Fullalove. "Really, I am at a loss to know why you repel my advances. I always respected and loved your poor husband, and thought that you at least would be civil to me."

"You may have—I know you *did*, love my husband, Marcia Fullalove, but you cannot have respected him. I respected my husband—I don't think that I ever loved him—but I liked him, and respected him. I did indeed think until some weeks ago that I loved him, and I meant to make my whole life sacred to his memory, but you came in between my husband and me. I wish I could make you understand what a vain, wicked,

heartless woman you are. But I shall punish you, Marcia Fullalove, I shall punish you somehow. It is not right that you should escape—oh no, you shall not escape!” There flashed through her memory all the criticisms of herself, and the systematic espionage to which she had been submitted. “Betrayed, wicked, lying betrayer!” she cried, beside herself with passion, but jubilant that it was getting way; “you shall be taught what it is suddenly to find your heart homeless; to feel that there is no longer any truth and honesty in the world, because your trust is fixed somewhere in something, in somebody, for all your vapouring. You shall learn what it is to weep with grief and anger until your eyes are dry and scorching, and your heart aches. You shall know what it is to be awake all night and hear the weary hours striking as if the bells were in your brain, and be conscious that the misery coiled round your heart will stay there all the next day, and that it will be down with

you next night, and that it will never, never leave you; and when you have begun to be reconciled to your loss, you shall learn what it is to have your very heart torn out and flung in your face, or there is no justice anywhere."

Lady Fullalove, who had listened without a word or motion to Laura Ruthven's speech, burst into a hard laugh when she had concluded.

"Are you not afraid to laugh?" asked Laura, who began herself to feel fear in presence of a woman whom she could not but consider as either a lunatic or an unsexed monster of appalling heartlessness.

"My poor child," replied Lady Fullalove. "Someone has abused me to you evidently, and I forgive you."

"You have abused yourself, Lady Fullalove. I have read all your letters to my husband, in which you write yourself down a creature—such a creature—the very name women shudder to think of."

"My letters to your husband!" said Lady Fullalove thoughtfully. For a moment or two she stood with bent brows; and when she had recalled the tenor of her notable epistles, a mischievous and half-triumphant smile dawned in her face.

"I see," she said with a little laugh. "You—you don't mean to say that you suppose I—Ho! It's"—with another laugh—"too absurd."

"It is like the foolish woman who wrote Marcia's letters to my husband to imagine that she can laugh away her guilt in that way," said Laura Ruthven.

"But do you know, child, that you are talking in a most scandalous manner?" said Lady Fullalove, for the first time showing some anger.

"*Talking* scandal!" exclaimed Laura Ruthven. "If scandal were talked and published more widely, there would be less of it done, Lady Fullalove. It is you and such as you

who make an outcry about *talking* scandal—for reasons of your own.”

Lady Fullalove recovered her temper as suddenly as she had lost it, and surveying Laura Ruthven from top to toe with interest and amusement, she said, sighing, “If you would only become one of us, all these things would be clear to you!”

“Why have you come here to torment me?” cried Laura, beside herself.

“You torment yourself, child,” said Lady Fullalove. “But I will relieve you of my presence.”

“And have you nothing to say? Are you really impenitent?” asked Laura Ruthven.

“Impenitent!” exclaimed Lady Fullalove with some disdain. “If I thought, Mrs. Ruthven, that I should ever do anything unworthy of myself, I should by my own hand put an end to my existence. I have reached that stage of development, Mrs. Ruthven, in which right and wrong cease to have any

meaning, or rather are seen to be simply allotropic forms of the same essence. Penitence may be a luxury for the unregenerate, but to indulge in it is as impossible for us as it is for statesmen to play at marbles in the street."

"I do not understand your jargon. You are triumphant just now, Lady Fullalove," said Laura Ruthven, glowing with anger, "and you think yourself armed against remorse and regret, but when you yourself suffer, and you shall be *made* to suffer what I have suffered, you will find perhaps that penitence is the only luxury left you."

"It is you who require to be penitent," said Lady Fullalove loftily, "I disdain to say more. If you will become one of us, what is at present misunderstood by you will be set *right*—one must use your wretched exoteric words."

"I hope I shall always misunderstand right and wrong," said Laura Ruthven.

"I will allow you your petty joke. Good-bye," said Lady Fullalove; and she rang the

bell herself, and on Clooper's appearance left the room without waiting to be dismissed.

Poor Laura! She felt as if she could, vulgarly speaking, have torn her hair. She had failed to make the least impression on this woman of adamant; she had been laughed at and scorned. But she would have vengeance yet, she would wring Marcia's heart—if she had a heart.

And her husband. "One hundred guineas to my life-long friend, Lady Fullalove." What a diabolical cynic he must have been! To leave these letters for his wife to read, knowing that she would be certain to find out who Marcia was; and to put the seal to his criminality by that legacy, as if to assure his wife with his last breath, that he also was impenitent. And doubtless he, too, could do no wrong. Oh! it was a horrible and loathsome thing for poor Laura Ruthven.

While she was endeavouring to recover some placidity of mind and manner before presenting

herself to Charlotte Walton, for not even to Charlotte did she mean to reveal her husband's infidelity, and she wished that her appearance should if possible require no explanation, a second visitor was announced—"Mr. Stoneman."

Of all men who could have called on Laura Ruthven, Robert Stoneman was the very last she would have expected. He had striven hard for a footing as a visitor in Lexham Gardens, but had never achieved his desire. He was a far-off relation of John Ruthven's, and had been helped and helped again, until John Ruthven discovered that the money Stoneman begged of him was not, as he represented, to keep the wolf from the door, but for purposes of speculation. When taxed with his fraud, Robert Stoneman had shuffled out of it somehow, and John Ruthven, "good, easy man," overlooked it. Stoneman was head ledger-clerk in a bustling new bank, and a deacon in the florid red-brick Independent

Chapel in Trumpington Square. These very respectable positions did not by any means recommend him to his wealthy relative ; but they were amenities which John Ruthven could have got over had they not been accompanied by all the offensive airs which the so-called self-made man is prone to exhibit, and which in his case had superinduced a general saintliness of manner befitting his undeserved, and in justice to himself it must be added, unexpected position, as a deacon in Trumpington Square. The religion in Trumpington Square was, like the building, flamboyant ; and Mr. Robert Stoneman, though not by any means an exuberant man, had adapted himself to his surroundings. He was not a pleasant person to have at dinner, and still less so in a drawing-room. He had never been invited to Lexham Gardens, but when he had called, and he had been in the habit of doing so several times a year, he had been tolerated. Laura Ruthven, for her husband's sake, had forced herself to be

gracious to him ; but that his visits were to continue now that her husband was dead was a thing as unlooked for as it was undesired.

“Mr. Stoneman,” said Laura Ruthven, “this is quite unexpected !”

Mr. Stoneman was tall, raw-boned, and lank, with colourless hair and eyes and drooping eyelids. His nether lip was heavy ; his face was shaved in places, and he spoke in an unctuous but harsh voice.

“I should have had the pleasure of calling sooner, but you were from home,” he said. “I have taken the first opportunity that presented itself—presented itself, Mrs. Ruthven”—Mr. Stoneman had a habit of looping up his sentences in that way—“and here I am. I have only half an hour to spare.”

“A whole half-hour!” thought Laura Ruthven in despair. “If Charlotte would only come !”

“Mrs. Ruthven, I am a plain man,” said Mr. Stoneman with distinct and somewhat incom-

prehensible satisfaction—"a plain man. I know it, and you know it." Here he paused.

Laura Ruthven did not contradict him ; so he continued :

"I have been blessed in my basket and my store, and my quiver also is well-replenished. You know it, Mrs. Ruthven. Seven little ones, motherless, Mrs. Ruthven—for five years, motherless. If I have now a small competence in addition to my—to my professional income, it is owing exclusively to your husband's Christian charity, which was so misrepresented, you may perhaps remember. Mrs. Jenks is a very capable woman, no doubt—there *is* no doubt of it," said Mr. Stoneman challenging contradiction ; while Laura Ruthven wondered who Mrs. Jenks could be. "She washes these seven children and dresses them every morning in a Christian spirit—" (his house-keeper evidently);—"she punishes them, Mrs. Ruthven, she punishes them, if I may say so, with Christian rigour. She is trying to bring them into the

fold. Have you read Dr. McCreedy on *Infant Salvation*, Mrs. Ruthven? I will send it you ; it is a beautiful tract. It is imbued with a spirit—a spirit of—with a spirit, Mrs. Ruthven, of a kind seldom to be met with.”

“I do not care for Dr. McCreedy’s works,” said Laura Ruthven, who had been several times on the point of interrupting Mr. Stoneman.

“In time you will like them, Mrs. Ruthven—in time. Mrs. Jenks likes them ; but while she has imbibed some of their spirit, there is a certain hardness about Mrs. Jenks. To these seven unfortunate babies she is everything—except a mother. She hasn’t the mother’s heart ; she has gifts, but that is not one of them. Mrs. Ruthven, she is a hireling. God prospered your husband, and you have inherited his wealth—much more than you can possibly spend on yourself. What are the purposes of Providence in thus devolving upon you so much of this world’s goods, in giving you, if I

may use the phrase, ten, nay, a hundred talents? Believe me, Providence has a purpose, or purposes—they may be hidden, but they will be revealed to the seeking mind. My dear Mrs. Ruthven, your husband, my much lamented cousin, omitted to mention me in his will—nay, I have not come to beg: what was his intention in that omission? The reply of the worldling is obvious;—to cut me off without a shilling. But let us search deeper, Mrs. Ruthven; let us endeavour to find out the combined purposes of Providence, and your husband, my late, lamented cousin.”

“Mr. Stoneman,” said Laura Ruthven, at the end of her patience, “will you be so good as to say what you want in one sentence?”

“It cannot be said in one sentence, Mrs. Ruthven; but I will be brief. The hope, with which I came here, I may say, is considerably damped, but my duty to my seven unfortunate babes forbids me to withhold my message—a message of peace, which I am persuaded has

not been altogether dictated by a worldly spirit. To the seeking mind, I repeat, the purpose of Providence will be revealed. I am afraid you have not a seeking mind, Mrs. Ruthven ; but I have, and I think I can help you out of your difficulty. You are overburdened with wealth, and you are young and beautiful, and you have gifts, gifts of sweetness and of intellect. Upon what are you going to spend these talents ? On the pleasures of this fleeting world ? Surely not. Surely you desire a mission, something to live for. If so, behold seven motherless children, and their father—the babes yearning for someone to be kind to them, the father yearning for a responsive heart. I submit that here is a mission, here is a purpose, such as Providence had in its eye when you were left a widow. If you will marry me, Mrs. Ruthven, you will bring wealth and beauty to a home which, while it is removed from all fear of poverty, has never known that ease and luxury which is the deserved portion of the true Christian.

I have nothing to settle upon you save my children ; but they are indeed a treasure. Seven babes I can offer you, with all the complex duties they entail, duties which are the highest that can fall to the lot of woman. Mrs. Jenks might perhaps remain. As I said, her discipline is irreproachable, and—”

At that moment Charlotte Walton entered the room—luckily for Mr. Stoneman. Laura Ruthven's wrath turned to laughter, a genuine fit of laughter that did her good.

“Oh ! Charlotte,” she said, “do you want a family ? Only say the word and you can have seven cherubs ; in exchange for which you would be expected to devote your life to this solemn gentleman. There is a Mrs. Jenks who will help you to wash and dress the babies, and she would take all the whipping off your hands.”

“Mrs. Ruthven, this is not a Christian spirit,” said the crestfallen Mr. Stoneman. “I offer you privileges, the highest privileges on this

earth, and you sneer—you are but a female Shimei, Mrs. Ruthven.”

“Do you think Mr. Stoneman’s children are privileges, Charlotte?” asked Laura Ruthven.

“They must be of an unusual kind, then, or else Mr. Stoneman is very generous,” said Charlotte Walton, grasping at least the main idea of the situation at once; “for people are not as a rule anxious to share their privileges.”

“That is what is called wit, I suppose,” said Mr. Stoneman acidly. “Cleverness I have always regarded as savouring of insubordination to Providence, and wit is a snare of the evil one.”

“Is Providence not clever?” asked Laura Ruthven mischievously.

“If you mean Providence with a capital P, that is blasphemy,” said Mr. Stoneman, becoming very rigid. “All cleverness is, in my opinion, more or less blasphemous. The truth can be stated in only one way. Wit, paradox, cleverness is simply practical atheism.”

"Do you know, Mr. Stoneman, that you have become very entertaining—which you certainly were not before," said Laura Ruthven.

"All truth when heard for the first time is entertaining," said Mr. Stoneman sententiously.

"You should write a book, Mr. Stoneman," said Charlotte Walton, laughing. "It would be very entertaining, if you filled it with truth of that kind. But why did he call himself Lady Fullalove, Laura?"

"What?—Oh!" cried Laura, and she laughed again in spite of herself. "Lady Fullalove has gone nearly half-an-hour."

"You are very merry, ladies," said Mr. Stoneman, moving to the door. "I shall pray for you to-night."

"Mr. Stoneman," said Laura Ruthven, arresting that gentleman, who had opened the door and was in the act of leaving the room, "you have made a sad mistake—a sad mistake—for yourself, I am afraid. The cares of such

a large family must weigh heavily on you, and—you have forgotten yourself. I shall not remember this, Mr. Stoneman, and I shall take care to amend the omission, which I am certain was an oversight, in my husband's will. Good-bye, Mr. Stoneman ;” and she went to him, and held out her hand.

With a half-startled, half-ashamed look, Mr. Stoneman took the little hand offered, grasped it tightly, and went away without a word.

As soon as he had gone, Laura Ruthven threw herself on a couch and burst into tears.

“ Oh ! Charlotte,” she cried, “ I wish I were poor. I want to go where there are no men. What wretches, what brutes men must be to come and propose in cold blood marriage to a woman whose husband is hardly six months dead ! What can men think of us, Charlotte, that they dare to do it ? ”

“ Men never think, Laura ; they only feel.”

“ How ! that is what men say of women.”

“ Quite so ! When you've lived as long as I

have—and two years make a great difference at our age—you will learn to apply all the sayings that men have made about us to themselves. No man ever understood a woman ; they simply read their own natures into ours.”

“I’m afraid Mr. Stoneman would call that blasphemy,” said Laura Ruthven with a smile.

CHAPTER XV.

AN IMPORTUNATE WOOER.

HAS the reader forgotten the Rev. James Crowe, B.A., London, and vicar of St. Cunegonde's? On his first appearance in our story we introduced him at breakfast, his solitary bachelor breakfast, meditating on the inconveniences of the single life; and the last sight we caught of him was through Laura Ruthven's drawing-room window, whence we saw him retiring discomfited from an ill-timed siege of our heroine's—bank account. The Rev. James Crowe recovered rapidly and easily from what he considered the temporary blight of his matrimonial hopes; and continued on Sundays to pound away at the good-natured world with the vigour and point to which he had accustomed his

hearers, and on week-days to dine silently at the houses of the wealthier members of his congregation. But trouble was in store for the Rev. James. One morning, instead of the expected fortnightly discourse from the Rev. William Hepburn, Inverannock, Argyleshire—the clever, epigrammatic discourse of Scotch length, which the Rev. James Crowe cut into two, and for which he paid the author the sum of one pound—there came the following letter :

“ 15 Banbury Crescent, W.C.

“ Thursday.

“ MY DEAR CROWE,—I have come up to London to try my fortune. I can write, as you know ; and you can get me introductions. You may wonder why I didn't advise you of this plan ; but when it occurred to me I felt certain that if I were to sit down and think and write about it, I shouldn't carry it out. So I packed up my few belongings at once and came away before my resolution should fail. I am here now to do or die. I must ask you to come and see me immediately.—Yours truly,

“ WILLIAM HEPBURN.”

The Rev. James Crowe clutched his comely beard, and brought his fist down on the letter with a bang—being a clergyman he did not swear. It wasn't that he felt the least afraid that Hepburn would betray him; but he did hate to be "bothered." Here was a necessity for actually thinking what was to be done; and that was the kind of "bother" which the Rev. James Crowe liked least. However, there is this advantage in being without the habit of thought—it takes no time at all to arrive at a decision. In two minutes after the receipt of Hepburn's letter, the Rev. James Crowe had recovered most of his tranquillity, having made up his mind as to his course of action. He finished his breakfast, glanced over the newspaper, read a chapter of a French novel, dressed himself with more attention than usual, and went out. He took his way to Lexham Gardens, and he stopped at number 6.

Laura Ruthven, astonished that he should call on her, and at such an hour, received him

in the presence of Charlotte Walton. He made a number of general remarks in an inept way, to which Laura Ruthven replied as briefly as possible, while Charlotte Walton listened in ominous silence. There were many gaps in the conversation. Health, the weather, Brighton, were moved about like pawns; and the Rev. James Crowe became every moment more nervous, until Laura Ruthven began to perceive that he had a gambit of some kind to play, guessing shrewdly that Charlotte Walton was the opposing piece, and that consequently so long as she was present Mr. Crowe would not do his errand, whatever it was. Now she had no desire whatever for a second private interview with her reverend suitor, so she managed to make her friend join in the conversation, and then gradually withdrew from it herself. Disappointed and disgusted the Rev. James Crowe had at last to take his departure, leaving the ladies with a lively sense of his general inferiority to the rest of the human race.

He returned to his rooms and read some more of the French novel he had taken up after breakfast ; and then he had a very hearty lunch. After lunch two of the members of the St. Cunegonde's Guild Cricket Club called on him. Brandy-and-soda, big cigars, and dull, slow talk for an hour and a half, was very comforting to the suffering soul of the Rev. James. When his athletic friends had gone, he put on a blacker and shinier suit of clothes than he had worn in the forenoon, partly to appear more impressive, but chiefly to get rid of the smell of tobacco ; and then he went back to 6 Lexham Gardens. Numerous as his bad qualities were, he had the John Bull basis which has enabled so many dull men and things to succeed after countless drubbings.

Again Laura, without attempting to conceal her surprise, and allowing just as much of her annoyance to appear as would have daunted a nature not so dense as her visitor's, received him in her friend's presence. This time, however,

the Rev. James Crowe's mind was thoroughly made up.

"Can I ask you, Mrs. Ruthven," he said, "to favour me with a private interview?"

Charlotte Walton rose at once and left the room. She said nothing and Laura Ruthven said nothing, which made it very awkward for the Rev. James Crowe.

"I ought to apologise for calling again," he said, "but it has simply come to this, Mrs. Ruthven, that—I cannot live without you."

This was a very truthful declaration, and in two senses.

The Rev. James Crowe, since his rejection by Laura Ruthven, had spent his whole available time, which was a pretty fair proportion of the twenty-four hours, in dreaming about the pretty, the wealthy young widow. "What is one rejection?" he said to himself. "There are countless cases of men—I know several myself—who have been accepted after a dozen refusals." His own past career supplied him

with arguments in favour of renewing the attempt on Laura Ruthven's affections. Had he not failed at school, as a druggist, as a teacher—to succeed, after all, when the good time came, as a clergyman. And then, at cricket, how often had he been out for a duck's egg, or next to a duck's egg! and, on the other hand, how often had he in the second innings run into double and treble figures! Had he not batted once for a day and a half in a broiling sun; and was he going to be abashed because a quick-tongued little woman had clean bowled him before he had got his hand in? Not he; he would learn to play the bowling, and carry his bat out at the end of the match. The figures of speech or of thought that occurred to the Rev. James Crowe were always hazy. He bade himself look at the Rev. Thomas Smallbore, who had married a woman twice Laura Ruthven's age, it was true, and with only half her money, but then Smallbore was such a little dry splinter of a man,

with crooked legs, he had a right to think himself very well off indeed—much better off than he, the Rev. James Crowe would be, considering his natural advantages, were he to marry a woman twice as wealthy and good-looking as Laura Ruthven. There was also the Dean of Torchester, a long and lanky fellow, unable by any and every application of razors and washes to develop a hirsute adornment on his lantern jaws, who had vegetated as a curate for ten years, and then, when it came into his head apparently, had, without the least difficulty, wedded a beauty with wealth and connections; and everybody said that he would die a bishop. And was he, the Rev. James Crowe, with his fine eyes, his mellow voice, his ambrosial beard, his straight back and shapely limbs, not worthy of a merchant's widow! He wanted her for his own credit; he felt as if he should fall never to rise again in his own esteem did he not win her. But for herself also he wanted her. His fine black

eyes had received an indelible impression of the charming figure and pretty face that used to sit sometimes beside John Ruthven in the nave of St. Cunegonde's; and all that his tough, hard heart knew of love was an instinctive longing for Laura Ruthven. But it was not until the receipt of Hepburn's letter that he made up his mind, after two minutes' reflection, to resume his wooing. He did not know what Hepburn's game might be; but he knew what cards his former coach had to play—cards, that skilfully employed, might take the lead from him altogether, and in the end make him the loser. If he married Laura Ruthven not only could he snap his fingers at Hepburn, but he could, if he chose, cease to be an active member of a profession which, with all its advantages, had been to him a Nessus-shirt—the poison being, however, sufficiently dilute to be endurable. When he said to Laura Ruthven “I cannot live without you,” he was in earnest, and his declaration, as we

said before, was true from more points than one.

"Is this just?—is this manly of you?" said Laura Ruthven, indignantly, when at last words came to her.

"I—I throw myself on your mercy;" said the disconcerted wooer, and he made a motion as if to go down on his knees, but he thought better of it; perhaps a glance he caught of his new trousers draping his manly leg without a crease had something to do with his retaining the erect posture.

Laura Ruthven with an angry flush on her face moved towards the door; but the importunate clergyman intercepted her.

"When a man is driven to treat a lady as I am doing now," he said, clasping his hands without any affectation, "you may judge how his feelings have over-mastered his self-respect. You have rejected me once, Mrs. Ruthven, but you know, faint heart never won fair lady, and you must give me leave to plead my cause

again. Other clergymen, Mrs. Ruthven, men that I know—the very last men to attract ladies, have married wealthy women, and why shouldn't I? You know it's very hard on me, Mrs. Ruthven; it is indeed. Of course you aren't exactly one of my parishioners; you only came to St. Cunegonde's now and again, just to please your husband, I suppose; still, I seem to have a kind of claim on you. You are the first chance I've had since I came to London, and, to be honest, the best chance I've ever had. You see it's part of the career of a successful clergyman to marry a wealthy lady; they all do it; it's expected of them; and I have always looked upon it as the goal of my ambition. When a man spends his youth in study, and the best years of his life in the drudgery of a curacy"—sacrifices which Mr. Crowe had *not* made—"he has a right to expect, to demand something better than those who have never denied themselves anything. My ambition

has never been for high preferment ; let others intrigue for promotion, but give me a quiet country living with two or three curates, and a wealthy wife. Now, look at it fairly : is there anything wrong in that, Mrs. Ruthven ? Why, it's the common aim of two-thirds at least of those who wear my cloth ! I can't understand the reticence of most clergymen about it ; and still less can I comprehend the sneers at our expense, in this connection, that laymen are constantly indulging in. Why should they sneer at a thing they would give ten years of their lives to do themselves ? And if you liked I would give up the church entirely. It'll be very hard on me if you won't have me. I've got on ; I'm one of the most successful men in my way of my own time ; and it'll be rough on me if you won't have me. I won't go in for promotion ; it's not my line ; and the only other step in advance I can take is to marry a wealthy woman. And, by Jove, if you won't have me, I'm done for ; for I like you better

than any woman I ever saw, and I'll marry nobody else. I love you—indeed, indeed I do.

“Well,” said Laura Ruthven, whose anger had melted away in a kind of admiration of the self-exposure, which the man had been frank enough or stupid enough to make, she couldn't be sure which—“well, Mr. Crowe, I'll deal as plainly with you as you have dealt with me. In the first place, it is not likely that I shall ever marry again ; but I would never marry you in any case, supposing you were the only man in the world. And that is the kindest thing I can say to you, Mr. Crowe ; and I hope you will see the wisdom of forgetting me entirely.”

She rose and held out her hand, meaning to soften the blow ; but Crowe wouldn't take it.

“I can't understand it,” he said. He was thinking of those miserable specimens of humanity, Smallbore and the Dean of Torchester, and their matrimonial successes. He

caressed his beard for a second, and passed his hand through his crisp hair. "Won't you give me a chance?" he pleaded.

"I will never see you again, Mr. Crowe."

"But if you were to see me sometimes, you might change your mind. Marriages, Mrs. Ruthven, are made in heaven, and in refusing me you may be destroying your own chances of happiness."

"How can you talk in that hypocritical way after what you have already said to me, Mr. Crowe?"

"Well, but what's an unhappy man to do? You *must* let me see you again; it's only fair, you know. A man's feelings and his future are not to be trifled with in this way."

"I have nothing more to say, Mr. Crowe," the lady rejoined, and she rang the bell.

When Clooper appeared, she held out her hand, and the rejected one was forced to take it.

"Good-bye, Mr. Crowe," said Laura Ruth-

ven ; " I will send a basketful of things to your Dorcas Society to-morrow."

"Thank you," said Mr. Crowe, grinning with rage, and bearing it as well as he could.

"And for that other St. Cunegonde charity," continued our heroine maliciously, "in which you wished to interest me, I haven't the remotest sympathy with its present aim, but shall be happy to hear of its success in another direction."

The Rev. James Crowe returned to his room, and finished the novel he had been reading. Then he took an extra heavy dinner, and went out for the third time that day. He had only gone a few steps when an idea struck him. He entered the house again, and when he once more appeared in the street he was fingering something in his waistcoat pocket.

CHAPTER XVI.

A LAST CHANCE.

OF the many streets and squares and crescents of London that were once fashionable and are now not so, for a combination of faded elegance and flourishing squalor commend us to Banbury Crescent. Every half-dozen years Banbury Crescent emerges into "bad eminence," as a den of thieves or the scene of a murder. The thieves are never rooted out, and the murderer is seldom discovered. The nine days' or the nine weeks' wonder over, it lapses back into its obscurity, and the traveller by cab between Victoria and King's Cross glances at its decent, antique houses with subdued interest and respect; for the squalor of Banbury Crescent is not apparent to a passing observer. The pedestrian, however, curious in the lore of the

most amazing if not the most wonderful city in the world, detects it. It is on the straight side—the string of the bow by a curious solecism is also called crescent—that the signs of vice and misery are most evident ; and yet it requires one who has studied the features of London to perceive these signs. Anyone looking with a little attention could see that the tall grimy houses have fallen from their first estate. The cheap net curtains, or the absence of all curtains, the poor white blinds, the dirty windows, the broken railings, the blistered doors, are proof positive that the humanity responsible for these tokens has ceased to care much for appearances without necessarily having ceased to be respectable—we should rather say honest, because respectability is said to be impossible unsupported by something, not of the cycle order, that runs on wheels. We do not mean to imply that there are no honest tenants on the straight side of Banbury Crescent, but as almost without exception the whole thirty

houses are lodging-houses, and as it is a fact that none of the lodging-house keepers make any inquiries regarding the trade, occupation, or means of livelihood of their lodgers, it may be taken for granted that the exigencies of misfortune have at all events blunted the finer moral sense of the tenants of the aforesaid straight side of Banbury Crescent. But the true test of the standing of a house is its area. If that be clean it is of little consequence what the rest of the exterior is like, for the cleanliness of the area is the sign of a cleanly servant; and while a cleanly servant has been known to be dishonest, she is too rare a phenomenon not to be able to command a higher price than she is likely to get in Banbury Crescent. Uncleanliness is not only very far removed from godliness, but it is positively in itself a kind of dishonesty. The unclean area, with its green slimy flag-stones, its little heaps of coal-dust eddying in corners, its litter of ashes, mutton-bones, and decaying vegetables, is the sign of a

slatternly domestic ; and as there is never any change in the areas of the more disreputable side of Banbury Crescent, it is evident that the domestics are all and always slatterns. Easy-going honest people have been known to tolerate slatterns, but as it is too absurd to suggest that thirty contiguous houses are tenanted by people whose good nature makes them careless, we abide by our opinion that dirt—a crescent-full of unchanging dirt is a sign of prevailing dishonesty. The great Hebrew pronouncer of proverbs, concerning whom the question has been boldly put, “Was he a fool?” said in his heart, “All men are liars ;” and a modern observer, limiting the application of a somewhat similar remark with a modesty very unusual in the makers of generalisations, has said, unfeelingly, that all lodging-house keepers are cheats. For our part we regard both declarations as libels ; but we are clearly of opinion that dirt—not the necessary grime and smoke and smother of labour, but the un-

necessary, undusted, unswept, unscoured dirt, that holds its ground merely for want of labour, is a sure sign of mean spirits, of virtual, and, as a rule, of actual dishonesty. Let us enter with the Rev. James Crowe, who has occasion to call there, number 15 of this heaven-forgotten crescent, and see for ourselves.

The servant was short and dumpy, and her dull face greasy and sooty; the Rev. James Crowe had to inquire twice for the Rev. William Hepburn before she understood him. There was no mat at the street-door, and the hall was laid with odds and ends of old carpet and oil-cloth. A door on the left opened as he passed, and from a dingily-furnished room he saw a shabby-genteel individual with a shaved face come out, accompanied by a woman, neither old nor young, shabbily dressed, who seemed to be laying down the law in whispers. Crowe guessed rightly that the woman was the landlady; but he did not know that the shabby-genteel individual was a detective; detectives

were common visitors at Banbury Crescent. As he followed the servant upstairs, he began to breathe with difficulty, and he perceived that the air was filled with dust ; every step he took raised a little cloud at his feet. He caught glimpses of some of the other rooms, and saw that everything was faded and dirty ; there was no pretence about it. Crowe was not a shrewd observer, but the landlady with her mean apparel, and the shameless squalor of everything he could see about the house, told a story of which even he could decipher something.

There were four rooms in the attic, and in one of these he found his *quondam* mentor.

“What horrible hole is this you’ve come to, Hepburn?” he asked surlily, giving the Scotchman three fingers.

“Needs must,” said Hepburn, grasping his visitor’s hand, and pressing it feverishly.

Crowe, having dusted the only chair with his handkerchief, sat down and surveyed the room. The ceiling was very low, and netted with

cracks and cobwebs. A little washstand with an imitation marble top and cracked crockery stood on one side of the fire-place; on the other, a rickety sofa. Opposite the fire-place was the bed; Crowe did not look at it twice. In the window stood a toilet-table with a cheap looking-glass. A little table in the centre of the floor was covered with a loathsome oil-cloth, stained with ink, and spotted with hard usage. A single tallow candle in a cracked, delf candlestick burned on the mantel-piece, for the sunlight, although not yet quite gone for the rest of the world, had almost finished for the day with poor Hepburn's attic. A few beams still struggled down the wide chimney; but a high lime-tree, growing up from what had once been a garden, effectually darkened the window. There were no pictures of any kind on the walls; and everything—walls, bed, tables, floor—was thick with dust. Hepburn sat on his box in front of the sofa, and watched Crowe while he examined the room.

William Hepburn, who was barely forty, had the appearance of an old man. His ragged whiskers and disordered hair were as gray as ashes; his lips were thin and pale, his cheeks sunken, and his eyes far back in his head. Although there were no blotches on his face, it had a most unwholesome look. He opened and shut his hands nervously as he sat waiting for Crowe to speak.

"I think you're a great fool," said the English clergyman at last.

"I have been, all my life," said Hepburn.

"And particularly just now. What, in heaven's name, do you expect to do in London?"

Hepburn got off his box and opened it. He took out a bundle of manuscript which he offered to Crowe; on second thoughts, he retained it in his own hands.

"Here are fifty sermons," he said—"fifty sermons, as good ones as I ever wrote. I'll give them to you for thirty-five pounds down;

that's thirty per cent. reduction on the retail price."

"And what good will that do you?"

"It'll give me six months here to try my luck in."

"It will give you one month of drunkenness here to go to the devil in; that's what it will do. Let me see the sermons."

He snatched the bundle of manuscript from Hepburn, who seemed inclined to resist; looked it over carelessly, and then put it in his breast pocket and buttoned his coat.

"Now, look here, Hepburn," he said, rising, "I won't have any nonsense, and I won't have you in London; that's all about it."

"I shall stay in London," said Hepburn. "I'm here to do or die."

"What money have you just now?"

"I haven't a penny. It took all I could scrape together to get here."

"Then, here is the first offer I mean to make you; I have two. I advise you to

accept the first. Go back to Inverannoch; start to-night. I shall pay for your ticket, and—and give you a bundle of sandwiches. You have managed to get along well enough for a good while now with the help of your friends and a pound a fortnight from me. There are fifty sermons here, you say; that's nearly two years in which you have no need to do work for me. I will pay you fortnightly as before; you have books in Inverannoch; and you can do or die in literature, particularly the latter, anywhere. That's my first offer; and I advise you to accept it."

"I won't go back," said Hepburn in a shaky voice. "I can't go back. My friends have tired of me; they send me nothing now. Give me this chance, Crowe. I think I deserve it; I've wrought well for it; and I've a right to claim it from you. It's ridiculous to say I can get on in Inverannoch; I want to try journalism. You can give me introductions to more than one editor—"

"You needn't talk, Hepburn. You and I can't be in London together."

"Are you actually afraid of *me*?" said the miserable man. "Give me this start, and you shall never see or hear of me again. You don't mean to say you are afraid I would betray you. Come, Crowe, you know me better than that."

"Do you suppose that I'm going to preach your sermons every Sunday in St. Cunegonde's with you going drunk daily from public-house to public-house bragging about it all over London? Your intentions are all right, no doubt; but I know the difference between Philip drunk, and Philip sober."

"But I'm never really drunk now," said Hepburn, eagerly; "nothing can make me drunk; I have got seasoned, and practically live on whisky. I know I haven't long to live, but even at the old rate there's a year or two in me yet. Have you heard of Rappaccini's daughter?—she lived on poison, nothing but poison, and was a beauty, and strong and

healthy. And I know of men who have been drunk for fifteen years on a stretch, and you wouldn't have guessed it; it had become their second nature. I shall be drunk in that way till I die; I'm drunk in that way now. Give me a pen and paper, and I shall write the best sermon or the best essay you ever read. I have some things I want to say, and I must get them said. I've been a wreck all my life, and I want to do something worth doing before I die. Out of this very evil I have brought upon myself, I mean to bring good. If I were to give up alcohol and go into an asylum of some kind, or even to go back to old dead-and-alive Inverannoch, I might live for twenty or ten years yet, doing nothing, an idiot to all intents and purposes. But I mean to drink in order that I may do something—to drink and write myself to death in London here, and perhaps be remembered as one who found a soul of good in his own ill-deeds. For God's sake, man, give me a chance."

"I won't," said Crowe doggedly.

"Then God forgive you, as I do," said the poor fellow. "But what's your other offer?" he added, and a flash of hope crossed his face.

"Do you remember," said Crowe in his most mellifluous tones, "the attack of *delirium tremens* you had when I was at Inverannoch?"

Hepburn nodded, and leant forward with close attention. Crowe had resumed his seat, and seemed to be pretty well pleased with himself.

"Immediately after your recovery I found you with a bottle of laudanum just about to commit suicide."

"I remember. It was a glass-stoppered bottle of foreign make with grooves in the stopper to drop the laudanum. I got it from a traveller. You took it from me; you had to knock me down to get it; and I was grateful afterwards; but I wish I had drunk it now."

Crowe had opened his coat, and held his

hand in his waistcoat pocket while Hepburn spoke.

"There is my second offer," he said. "I have kept it untouched all these years. The truth is, I thought I might perhaps need it myself; one can never tell."

Hepburn took what Crowe offered him.

"Good God!" he cried. "It's the very phial."

Then he stared at Crowe with a look that made even that pachydermatous cleric shudder; it was the look of a doomed man.

"Send me word to-morrow," said Crowe, rising hastily. "You are still at liberty to accept the first offer."

"You won't leave me like this, Crowe. I haven't eaten a morsel since I left Scotland, and my whisky's all done. For God's sake—"

As Crowe shut the door behind him, Hepburn fell fainting on the floor.

Crowe spent the whole of the next day in

the house, eating and smoking and reading a trashy novel. When his evening paper came he examined it with some anxiety, which soon passed; he smiled, for he found what he wanted. He read the following brief paragraph three times :—

“SUPPOSED SUICIDE.—At 15 Banbury Crescent—ominous locality—William Hepburn, supposed to be a clergyman from Scotland, was found dead this morning, with a small bottle, which had evidently contained laudanum, in his clenched hand. No money was found on deceased. The police as yet assign no reason for the rash deed. In all likelihood this will add one more to the mysterious crimes which have given Banbury Crescent its unenviable notoriety.”

Crowe went to the opera that night with a light heart; and a fortnight after he was accepted by the widow of a horse-dealer, nearly as wealthy, and three times older than Laura Ruthven. He then resigned his charge, and

went abroad. His parishioners gave him £500 worth of plate as a wedding present; and his reputation as a preacher is still alive.

CHAPTER XVII.

AVELAND ON THE WAR-PATH.

"By Jove! this is news," said William Aveland to himself one morning as he glanced through a letter from his friend Jack Shortish. "Let me see, 'The little Walton,'" he read aloud, "'has *joined herself*—Biblical expression, old man—to a certain widow. Husband was a city Cræsus. Name, Ruthven. Said to be young, lovely, and anxious to marry again. Meant to go in for her myself, but resign in your favour. She must be a good sort. That little mild-and-bitter—bibulous expression, old man—Charlotte Walton, would not take up with her unless she were quite O.K.—slangy expression, old man. You know Mrs. Walton well. They live in Lexham Gardens. Enough

said.' — Know her well! I should think so."

The fact is that William Aveland and Charlotte Walton had been boy and girl together. They had not seen much of each other of late. These two young people had been brought up in the same nursery, they had fought together for the actual possession of toys which were common property, and in these battles with Miss Charlotte, Master William had generally come off second best. Miss Charlotte being a girl-child would hit out anywhere and everywhere, using either her honest fists, or clutching, clawing, or hair-pulling, as the spirit might move her; while Master Aveland, when he did succeed in hurting Miss Charlotte, was informed by that young lady that "he was a nasty cowardly boy for hitting a girl." When young Aveland came home for the holidays, he and Charlotte were always as thick as thieves for a couple of days; for the rest of the time they fought like tigers, as has been

stated. But on Black Monday, when Master Aveland went back to school, Miss Charlotte would put Niobe herself to shame with the fountains of her ready tears ; while Master Aveland would moon about in the society of Miss Charlotte, feeling very uncomfortable indeed, and, to tell the truth, rather inclined to cry. On that last day of the holidays each used to exhibit to the other their mutually inflicted bruises, and for full twenty-four hours after their parting both were supremely unhappy. But there never had been any passages of love as yet between the two young people. The boy of seventeen looks upon the girl of fourteen as a child ; he admires the full-blown rose, of course, and is already burning to declare his secret passion to some syren of five-and-forty ; while as to the growing girl, the astonishing deference with which she is at times treated by members of the opposite sex, who through only seeing her half-length are not aware of her tender years and the shortness

of her frocks, her mind remains, for two or three years at least, in a state of dazed bewilderment ; she hasn't felt her feet. Thus it was that there was a strong liking between Aveland and Mrs. Walton, but that though they each had liked the other very much, yet at no period of their lives had even the idea of tender passages between them ever passed through their minds. Then Charlotte Walton had gone to a French school to be "finished," and Master William Aveland had entered the Diplomatic Service. Being a very good-looking young fellow and a particularly light dancer, he was considered by those who ought to know to be likely to get on in the service, and if he would only run straight and play his cards properly he was bound to do well.

Aveland finished his breakfast and his meditations on Jack Shortish's letter at the same time. His mind was made up. He would call at once on Charlotte Walton. He did so, and found that the two young widows

had gone to Switzerland. Now Aveland had heard of John Ruthven and his great wealth—as what man about town hadn't? and he determined to continue proceedings as promptly as he had begun. "I am simply shying away sovereigns every moment I linger here," he said to himself. In a few hours he was on the road to Switzerland.

Does the reader know why Laura Ruthven and Charlotte Walton had gone to Switzerland? Do readers know why they go themselves? If they do, then we have to assure them that our heroine and her friend went there for identical reasons. They might have gone to the Riviera, they might have gone to the Nile, to Scotland, to Norway, or to a German watering-place, but for the above-mentioned very cogent reasons they preferred Switzerland. Dr. Harley had recommended the Highlands of Scotland, and Mrs. Croft had positively quarrelled with Laura Ruthven, and absolutely refused to have anything further to do with

Charlotte Walton, because they wouldn't go to Egypt.

"Well," said Mrs. Colonel Croft, "here are my last words to you, Laura Ruthven. You will only regret it once, and that will be till your dying day. The sight of snow, especially on high mountains, is most deadly for the digestion, and glaciers are worse. Now the Pyramids, and that sweet sphinx, they are so warm-looking and grand and solitary and poetical that they soothe the stomach. The whole time I was in Egypt I was free from my disease; the very thought of the Pyramids is like a gentle tonic. And the Nile, the mighty Nile, bringing down all that delightful mud and clapping it like a poultice on the land. Laura Ruthven, if you don't go to Egypt you are sinning against the light, and you will be punished for it. Every glance at the Matterhorn will be a nail in your coffin, and the glaciers will rise up to testify against you." But even the last fearful thrust had no effect; and as for Dr.

Harley's recommendation, Laura had not derived such extraordinary benefit from her stay at Brighton to be inclined to follow his advice in her second venture. And so to Switzerland they went.

It was at the Hotel Zimmermann, in one of the most picturesque parts of Switzerland, not fifty miles from the Lake of Geneva, not twenty miles from Chamounix, under the fine view of Mont Blanc, seen across the little lake of Himmels-Wasser, that the two ladies were staying. Don't be afraid, reader, its real name is not the Hotel Zimmermann, the name of the little lake isn't even Himmels-Wasser, and we haven't been bribed to do an artfully disguised advertisement by innumerable cases of (Neufchatel) champagne. Herr Zimmermann has two distinct entities; he is Herr Zimmermann, the bland, the obliging, the thoughtful, the suggestive to those visitors of whatever nationality who *stay* at the Hotel Zimmermann; but to the tourist who merely *stops*, particularly to

the wretch who pays him with coupons, the man with the exiguous wardrobe, the Homeric appetite, and the taste for economy—to them Herr Zimmermann is a different being altogether. Then, indeed, does Zimmermann become a fiend in human form, a sworn tormentor, a very mountain ogre. Out of the season his friends boast that it was Zimmermann who first invented the ingenious expedient of retaining his guest by means of soaking his boots in boiling water, and then carefully drying them in a quick oven. Of course the cheap tourist never travels with more than one pair of boots, there are no ready-made boots to be had in Himmels-Wasser, and it takes a week to make a pair. It is said that a Young Men's Christian Association some thirty strong once upon a time arrived late one evening at the Hotel Zimmermann, and informed the waiter that they didn't want any supper, and that they wished to start at dawn. Johann, the head waiter,

with tears in his voice, informed Herr Zimmermann of the abominable intentions of the thirty young men. Herr Zimmermann was equal to the occasion. "It makes nothing, my good Johann," he said, "it makes nothing," and then he crossed his arms on his manly chest in imitation of the great Napoleon. "Pake their poots," cried Herr Zimmermann. Herr Zimmermann always spoke English when he was excited, and he was very much excited indeed when he gave the fatal order. Johann did as he was bid, and the thirty young men stayed a week at the Hotel Zimmermann, which was a splendid thing for Herr Zimmermann and the local shoemaker. Herr Zimmermann perceived at once, when the two young widows, attended by Miss Pinfold, arrived at his caravanseraï, that they meant *staying*, and not merely *stopping*. Herr Zimmermann became very attentive indeed ; he gave the two ladies a charming sitting-room on the ground floor which opened into his own private garden,

and had a splendid view of the distant mountains, the Himmels-Wasser Lake, and the great roaring, thundering, hissing waterfall that lost itself in its tranquil waves. Herr Zimmermann moved his Erard cottage-piano, his own particular, private Erard cottage-piano, into that cosy sitting-room for the use of the two young English ladies ; he attended to the *menu* of their meals himself, he saw that they were not annoyed, disturbed, or molested. The two ladies had come for peace, change, and health to the hotel Zimmermann, and they found them there.

They had had a fortnight of the Hotel Zimmermann, and it was with a cry of delight that Mrs. Walton took the card which Johann politely handed her from his salver, and read upon it the name of Mr. William Aveland.

“What makes you so pleased, Charlotte?” said Mrs. Ruthven.

“Our solitude is about to be broken, dear ;

the serpent, in the shape of Willie Aveland, has appeared in this terrestrial paradise."

"And who is Willie Aveland, Charlotte? Do you mean to see him?"

"See him! see Willie! Of course I shall see him. Show him up at once, Johann," said Mrs. Walton. "Oh, Laura," she cried as soon as the man had left the room, "he's so nice. No, dear, not in that sort of way, I don't mean that," said Charlotte Walton, noticing a smile on her friend's face, "and I am so fond of him, dear, and ten years ago we were like brother and sister, and used to pinch each other black and blue."

And then Willie Aveland, who looked as neat as a new pin, and very unlike the *viator vulgaris*, the common or garden tourist, entered the room with extended hand.

"Who would have dreamt of finding you here!" said William Aveland to Charlotte Walton.

"You are the very man one is sure to meet," replied Charlotte.

"How so?"

"You are the unexpected, Mr. Aveland."

"Well; and how have you been for these—by Jove, it must be half-a-dozen years since I saw you last! I declare that the dial moves backwards with you. You don't look a day older than when you and I used to play cricket together."

"Surely I haven't such a baby face; I was fourteen then."

"Still the old habit of fishing for compliments, Charlotte?"

"Still the old habit of impertinence, William."

"Truce—truce at once. I know better, by sad experience, than to bicker with you."

"If you behave yourself very well I will introduce you to my friend."

Aveland would behave—"by Jove, rather!"—and Charlotte made him known to Laura Ruthven. He stayed with the ladies for half-an-hour, and was very pleasant. He

addressed most of his conversation to Charlotte Walton. Some few remarks did pass between him and Laura Ruthven, and he took care to put an extraordinary amount of deference into his tone and manner when speaking to her. He did not mean to let the grass grow under his feet. He would take her by storm, he said to himself; he would make her see that it was love at first sight on his part, and marry her in a month. Having obtained permission to pay his respects to the ladies next morning, he withdrew. Charlotte explained to Laura her acquaintance with him, and let her understand the kind of man he was, as far as she knew. With all Charlotte's experience she didn't quite comprehend Mr. William Aveland. Laura Ruthven thought of refusing to see him, but agreeing with Charlotte that he was amusing, she concluded to tolerate him for a little. And so when he presented himself next morning he was received graciously.

"Do you know, Mr. Aveland," said Charlotte

Walton brusquely after some general remarks, "that I think I am in my second childhood?"

"You are enigmatic this morning," said William Aveland. "What are the first premonitions of St. Martin's summer? I am very curious to know, because I shall then be able to detect my own degeneracy when the time comes, and get into Parliament, or take prussic acid before anybody is a bit the wiser."

"I should think it must be delightful to be old," said Laura Ruthven.

"Is that your actual opinion?" asked Aveland, in a point-blank manner habitual with him.

We are of opinion that Laura Ruthven had never considered the question of old age in connection with herself at all, and that her present remark was a haphazard one. But she had made it, and, of course, she supported it. It was easy for her to do so conscientiously, because she felt it was in harmony with the life she had chosen—a life of single blessedness,

such a life as is devoid of the pleasures and honours that attend what we are old-fashioned enough to regard as woman's true career, that of wife and mother. It has none of the cares and anxieties, the heart-break, that so often cloud the close of the latter, and is usually crowned with a peaceful, contented old age. So Laura Ruthven thought, and looking into her heart, she found that she could at that time say to Mr. Aveland with truth, "Yes, I shall never be happy until I am an old white-haired woman with lots of girls and boys about me making love to each other and confiding in me."

William Aveland was about to reply, but something in Laura Ruthven's look and tone told him that the subject was dropped, as far as he was concerned. He therefore returned to Charlotte Walton.

"And why, Mrs. Walton, do you imagine that your second childhood has begun?"

"Because I am possessed with an exceedingly childish desire."

"For what? Peppermints or bull's eyes?"

"Oh! Something much more childish than that."

"I give it up."

"Would you believe it? I want an edelweiss."

"I don't see the childishness of that," said Aveland, with a disappointed air. "Children don't spend their half-crowns on ridiculous little, fluffy, leprous-looking mosses."

"The dear, little, downy darlings! how can you slander them so!" cried Charlotte Walton with simulated horror. "But I don't want to spend a farthing. I want somebody to risk his life in getting me one. Here I am a middle-aged woman, and nobody ever broke his neck or nearly broke it in finding an edelweiss for me. It's too bad, isn't it, Laura?" she added, with the prettiest pout in all the world.

"Terrible," said Laura Ruthven, laughing; "I wonder you have survived the neglect. I have never properly recovered the shock I

suffered when my nurse failed to fetch me the moon."

"What possesses these women?" Aveland asked himself. He thought he was a past master in the science of femininity (we like an old word sometimes, and femininity is one that should not be old); but here were two specimens of the genus widow which seemed to form a species by themselves. It was simply his ignorance, of course. He knew the young widow who, having got rid of the old husband, means to buy a young one with his wealth; he knew the fast young widow who means to enjoy life and never to marry again; he knew the tearful young widow, the young widow with a mission, and the pharisaical young widow; he knew middle-aged widows—and lumped them all into one class—but we had rather not say how he characterised it; old widows, who if they have not been widowed until past middle life, are, as a rule, the most delightful women in the world, he knew nothing of. Old widows

were, however, not mysteries to him, because he had never attempted to study them, but Laura Ruthven and Charlotte Walton fairly puzzled him. What was the meaning of the fearless, yet quite unconscious, frankness they both displayed? He couldn't fathom it; because it was quite inconceivable to him how two young and attractive women could have made up their minds that all mankind were to be henceforth but as brothers to them. It was their determination never to marry again, the feeling of liberty, the sense that they were not in the market, that never again would their happiness, present or prospective, depend upon their pleasing or displeasing an individual of the opposite sex, that had set their thoughts free, given them an unwonted air of independence, and even a certain dash which men like William Aveland were apt to misinterpret. Something saved him from making that mistake, but he couldn't understand.

"I am sorry I cannot get you the moon,

Mrs. Ruthven," he said, looking at her with undisguised curiosity. "At one word from you, however, I will charter a balloon and perish in the attempt."

"I hope your life is worth a little more than that," said Laura Ruthven in a tone that reproved the insincerity of his.

It was very annoying. Their extravagant talk had led him on, and when he replied in the same key he was taken to task.

"Don't mind Mrs. Ruthven," said Charlotte Walton, noticing Aveland's dismay. "She is quite soured because she can't get the moon. Take a balloon and bring me an edelweiss."

"If I take a balloon," said Aveland, keeping his eyes fixed on Laura Ruthven, "I shall go straight up till it bursts."

"Up like a rocket and down like a stick," said Laura Ruthven with a smile.

Aveland pulled his moustache and said nothing.

"I have no objection," said Charlotte Wal-

ton, "to your ending your career in whatever way you choose, only you might bring me an edelweiss first."

"I will," said Aveland. "I'll bring you an edelweiss and I'll go for it now."

When he had gone the ladies were silent for some time. At length Laura Ruthven spoke.

"The more I see of men the more I dislike them," she said.

"Why?" asked Charlotte Walton. "I think they're very amusing—particularly when, like our diplomatic friend, they are full of a natural cussedness."

Laura Ruthven did not reply at once. Her complaint against the sterner sex was the outcome of a rapid review of her life since the death of the husband who had deceived her. She had faced the first great calamity, fought with it, and in a way conquered it; but no sooner had she attained to a certain peace of mind than man after man came with his miser-

able proposal of marriage—making her life a farce, she said to herself bitterly.

“Why?” asked Charlotte again. “What general fault do you see in them?”

“Oh!” said Laura Ruthven with a half-laugh, “a universal hankering after us poor women.”

“I believe I have noticed something of the kind, too,” said Charlotte Walton. “It is a fault, no doubt, but I am inclined to excuse it. You see, after all, they are only men.”

“I don’t excuse them,” said Laura Ruthven with some passion. “No house-hunter would go to look at a house unless there was a ticket in the window or an advertisement somewhere. Is there anything about me, Charlotte, that could be taken to signify that I am to let?”

“Nothing except that you are a widow, and the fact of a woman being young and pretty and wearing a widow’s cap is equivalent to the big blackboard with white letters which marks the house to let.”

“Well, then,” said Laura triumphantly, “if men are to be excused for imagining that I am to let, there is surely nothing about me inviting them to ‘inquire within.’”

“My dear Laura, everything about you invites men to inquire within. You are good-looking, young, and rich. You are, to misquote, a widow, therefore to be wooed; you are a widow, therefore to be won.”

“But that is not what I mean. Is there anything in my manner—do I do or say anything to lead men on?”

“Oh, me! Laura, I wish you were as old as I am, and then you wouldn’t put such childish questions. If you frown at a man, he thinks you are in love with him and that you are trying to hide it through fear or shame; if you give him nothing but sharp answers he thinks you wish to provoke an explanation; if you laugh at him, he knows it is to keep from crying, because he doesn’t propose; if you are demure, he can quote profane scripture by the

yard against you ; if you are frank and open with him, the incorrigible creature thinks that you have simply broken your heart for him, because you believe him to be much too superior a person to marry you, and because you wish to have his friendship and enjoy a cold smile or two and a lukewarm word now and again. I don't think there is anything so intolerably conceited as a man except a giraffe."

"Is a giraffe conceited?"

"Of course he is. Doesn't he carry the highest head of all God's creatures. And look at his overweening neck. Do you think he has all that throat for nothing. If his neck were only stiffer he would be typical of the wicked man."

"But," said Laura Ruthven more seriously ; "do men really delude themselves in that foolish way?"

"Look," said Charlotte Walton, counting off the names on the fingers of her left hand, "Harry Summers, James Crowe, Leonard

Brandon, William Stoneman, did they delude themselves? and, fifthly, William Aveland; is he deluding himself?"

"No! surely not," cried Laura Ruthven in alarm. "I have been as distinctly frank and indifferent to Mr. Aveland as if he were an uninteresting statue of some forgotten heathen."

"And what does Mr. Aveland think of that, do you imagine? I'll tell you his thoughts: Widow (recently) holds back, of course, afraid, ashamed—mere fact of her coldness, sign of interest, can't trust herself, breaks through in warm gushes of feeling (that's your distant frankness). Fresh and young, would like to have her—beautiful, too; must have her—wealthy, will have her. He'll propose to-morrow."

"Oh, no! Charlotte. He mustn't."

"How can I help it?"

"I don't know. If he will insist in thinking me to let, try and make him—inquire next door."

"Of me?"

Laura nodded.

"We'll see," said Charlotte Walton. "Perhaps we'll manage to prevent his speaking at all."

Then Laura Ruthven went to her room to write a letter to Mrs. Croft ; and when she met Charlotte afterwards the latter said with a roguish smile, and with a look that would not be questioned, "I'm certain Mr. Aveland will not propose to-morrow. The edelweiss will keep him occupied all day."

CHAPTER XVIII.

AVELAND'S EDELWEISS.

It was in the afternoon that William Aveland brought the edelweiss to Charlotte Walton. Dressed in full Alpine costume he came, evidently fresh from the exploit—wonderfully fresh, considering all he had gone through. Swathed in many folds of paper, his treasure reposed between his feet while he recounted his adventure. Laura Ruthven was interested, amused, amazed; Charlotte Walton looked, to use Aveland's word, enigmatic.

"You must excuse me," said Aveland, "if I seem to be egotistic; I really have a remarkable story to tell."

"We shall be delighted," said Charlotte

Walton. "Use the first personal pronoun—unscrupulously."

Aveland looked queerly at Charlotte Walton for a moment or two.

"Unscrupulously is rather an ambiguous word," he said.

"Oh! I withdraw it," said Charlotte.

"What did you mean by it?"

"Well, you know, Mr. Aveland, Alpine-climbers have a special license even among travellers. We would like you to *interest* us, Mr. Aveland. That was all I meant."

"I understand," said Aveland. "You prefer a long bow and a keen arrow. To confess the truth," he added with a laugh, "my weapons are not by any means Lilliputian, but I assure you I can hit the mark this time without their help."

"Fire away then," said Charlotte Walton.

"I got this edelweiss within two hundred feet of the summit of the Pinselberg. Of course I went without a guide. Wasn't I to

risk my life, Mrs. Walton? Well, in order to give death longer odds I went straight up, and if I happened to come across a path I fled from it as if it had been the way to Tartarus. I won't bother you with the minor difficulties, such as the fifty peaks I had to ascend and descend before I came to the mountain proper."

"When did you start, Mr. Aveland?" interrupted Charlotte.

"I really don't know," replied the daring climber. "I feel as if I had been climbing since the day I was born; I feel like the squirrel who lives in a barrel cage; but I think I started immediately after I left you yesterday."

"And are you just returned?"

"About an hour ago."

"What a long time to be away! How did you do for food? But you will tell us all about it."

"Yes; I'll tell you all about it," said Ave-

land, pulling a long face, as if he expected to experience as much difficulty in telling his adventure as he had encountered in achieving it. "Where was I?" he asked meditatively.

"You had just climbed fifty subordinate peaks," said Charlotte gravely.

"Oh, yes. Well, my first real difficulty was a glacier full of crevasses. I had to cross it, or go back over these fifty peaks and begin the ascent anew."

"Why? Could you not go round the glacier?" Charlotte inquired.

"Impossible. A fellow may go round a fact, but he can't go round a glacier; besides, it was a new kind of glacier. I don't think anyone has ever come across it hitherto, and I never heard of one like it before. It was a sort of lake glacier!"

"How extraordinary!"

"Yes; it was surrounded on all sides by an byss, an oval abyss six miles in circumference,

about ten yards wide, and apparently unfathomable."

"Would you not rather call it a sort of island glacier?" asked Laura Ruthven, speaking for the first time.

"Very good," said Aveland. "A sort of lake-island glacier. Only the compound epithet is not quite adequate, because at two places the gulf was bridged by narrow gangways of ice, or else of course I couldn't have crossed it. I found that a line drawn between these gangways would have cut the glacier into two equal portions, and I made the discovery in a most marvellous way. I kept advancing from the gangway I had crossed straight forward until I came to a crevasse. I moved some dozen steps to the left in order to leap the crevasse at its narrowest part. In doing so, I felt a very curious sensation—as if I were walking on the sea; and when I came down with some weight on the other side of the crevasse the glacier began to sink. I saw it declining slowly on

one side and tilting up on the other. I ran up it, but in doing so I went too far, for it immediately began to decline where I stood. I dodged backwards and forwards for some time before I hit again on the straight line between the two gangways. Having done so, I fixed it with a landmark, and proceeded to experiment. Wherever in crossing the glacier I deviated six feet from its lesser diameter, so true was its balance, and so narrow compared with its bulk the two gangways, that it swayed like a chemical balance. About the middle of it, I came to a crevasse twenty feet wide. I thought of leaping it, but even with my spiked shoes I couldn't put enough speed on to risk it. But, remembering that my real errand was to get an edelweiss at the risk of my life, I thought I might as well endanger it by seeking for a narrower crossing as by trying to jump the twenty feet. I turned to the left, and immediately the glacier began to decline, but I kept on. There was no sign, however, of

the crevasses decreasing in width, and I had soon the utmost difficulty in retaining my footing. At about fifty feet from the diameter I stopped, and my heart gave a leap. In the centre of the crevasse there rose up a pillar of ice, the top of which, about two feet square, was on a level with the lips of the gulf; and here, to my joy, the width suddenly narrowed to about fifteen feet. Without a moment's hesitation I sprang into the air, and planting my alpen-stock on the pillar, vaulted clean over the crevasse. But on the other side I slipped, fell, and slid down about two hundred yards until I came in contact with a boulder, protruding about two feet from the surface of the glacier. My first thought was to leave the boulder and be done with it at once, before I had time to become afraid of death. I was in the very act of getting into a comfortable position to slide to the bottom into eternity, when my end of the glacier touched ground with a tremendous bump. Once, twice, thrice,

it vibrated from about twenty to five feet, and then it remained stationary at an angle of about seventy degrees. I thought intensely for five minutes. The result—better to slide down and be dashed to pieces than sit here and die of starvation. Once more I was in the very act of letting myself go, when I was again stayed. The glacier had begun to revert. There could be only one cause for that, something was counterbalancing me. I looked behind me, and sure enough three immense lammergeyers had alighted near the other extremity of the glacier. That was perhaps the most extraordinary coincidence in the whole of my adventure. Possibly there were—I use the past tense consciously—possibly there were only three lammergeyers left in Europe, and here they had come to my aid. As soon as the glacier had tilted back sufficiently to allow me to move, I proceeded to describe a chord from where I was to the opposite gangway. By a careful adjustment of my position, as I

moved along, I managed to cross the glacier and reach terra-firma again."

Aveland had a reputation as a *raconteur* of imaginary adventures ; but his present audience didn't assist him in the least by laughter, or any signs of approval.

"That is truly marvellous," said Charlotte with great gravity. "But I thought all glaciers were in motion, Mr. Aveland."

"All except this one ; it was stagnant. As soon as I left it, of course it began to decline towards the side on which the lammergeyers still sat. Down, down, down it went until it struck earth with a report like the discharge of a park of artillery. The noise of the concussion was followed by a hoarse shrieking sound of enormous volume, as if a thousand engines were letting off steam in conjunction with a million seamstresses tearing up webs of linen. A rumbling, and grumbling, and gurgling succeeded that, and before my astonished eyes, the glacier, as if by magic, was transformed

into a lake. The lammergeyers, the last lammergeyers in Europe, gorged with chamois, fluttered their wings helplessly in the new-born waves and were drowned. After a moment's reflection, I understood what had happened. This glacier had doubtless been cut off from a larger one, perhaps a hundred years before, by an enormous landslip. In the course of a century it had gradually lost its cohesion as ice, and the two bumps it had sustained through my agency and that of the lammergeyers had had the effect of re-arranging the already loosened molecules into their original form of water."

"You must really send an account of that to the *Times*, Mr. Aveland," said Charlotte.

"Where would be the use?" he replied. "They wouldn't publish it, or if they did, nobody would believe it. It couldn't be proved, for the thing's a lake now. No, no; I shall tell it only to an occasional sympathetic listener. But there are more marvels. I had climbed

about a thousand feet, when a noise above me made me look up. An immense rock had just detached itself from a precipice, and was thundering down upon me. I hadn't time to get out of its way. This will do now, I said to myself, resignedly. But just when I expected to be overwhelmed, the rock, which seemed to be about the size of the dome of St. Paul's, having caught on some impediment, bounded clean over my head. I turned and watched its descent. It struck the mountain side about twenty feet below me, and loosened six other rocks as large as itself, besides an immense number of smaller ones. The whole moving mass plunged down a dry couloir, raising a cloud of dust at each bump against the mountain, and loosening hundreds of boulders as it went, while the spaces between the larger masses were filled by an innumerable flight of smaller stones. Each stone shook its quantum of dust in the air, until finally the avalanche was enveloped in a vast cloud. The clatter of this devil's cavalry was

stunning. Black masses of rock emerged here and there from the cloud, and sped through the air like flying fiends ; they whizzed and vibrated as if they had wings. The clang and clatter resounded for ten minutes, gradually dying away as the whole troop splash-splashed into the lake that had been a glacier half an hour before."

"Have you a good memory?" asked Charlotte suddenly.

"Pretty fair," answered Aveland with some anxiety.

"I seem to know your description of the stone-avalanche quite well," said Charlotte mischievously.

"Of course," said Laura Ruthven. "We read it yesterday, Charlotte, or something very like it, in Tyndall's account of his ascent of the Weisshorn."

"Ah!" said Aveland, pulling his moustache, "I read that recently, too, and was much struck with it. It is no wonder that a similar pheno-

menon should recall Tyndall's description of the stone-avalanche which he saw."

"To be sure," said Charlotte. "It is the most natural thing in the world."

"Well," continued Aveland, "I climbed up steadily until I came to the foot of the precipice from which the boulder had started in its mad career, and there I was brought to a dead-lock. The rocks rose vertically to a height of about a thousand feet, and there was not the suggestion of a contour on either hand as far as I could see. I crawled round the base of the precipice for a considerable distance, and came at last to a phenomenon even more remarkable than the stagnant glacier. Have you seen the Staubbach?"

Both ladies had beheld that marvel, which we may say for the benefit of readers who have never been in Switzerland, or who have forgotten their geography, is a waterfall in the valley of Lauterbrunnen, called the Staubbach, or "dust fall," because from the tenuity of the

stream and the great height from which it falls, the water is broken into spray long before it reaches the bottom.

“Well,” continued Aveland, “yesterday I discovered a second Staubbach, as high, as lofty, as the other, but liker a gleaming strip of white satin ribbon than a long lace veil, for it was frozen. I could hardly believe my eyes when I saw it. The face of the precipice was craggy at the foot of this frozen waterfall, and I was able to climb up to where the congealed spray ceased. The unbroken icicle hung down within my reach with numerous ends like a tassel. I seized one of these to break it off, but it bent in my hand like a cane. I became terribly excited, and could hear the beating of my own heart. Looking up I saw that the whole length of the ice-fall was covered with knots and branches. I seized on two protuberances, and lifting myself from the ground hung at the end of the fall. The protuberances did not break off. I pulled myself up about a yard, but

suddenly found my feet on the ground again. I continued to climb, and though I moved up, as I thought, with some rapidity, I seemed to make little progress. I paused to think what I should do, and felt a curious double motion. I seemed to be swaying from side to side, and at the same time moving up and down. In a flash I solved the mystery. The thing was a glacier, a hanging glacier, and I was dangling at its extremity like a child's toy at the end of a piece of elastic. My weight had stretched it, when I began to climb, and that was why I had appeared to be making little progress. I resolved to ascend it to the top. It seemed to be as tough and limber as a bamboo. After I had gone up a hundred feet or so, my only fear was that I might over-tax the elasticity of this aerial glacier, and be thrown headlong with my novel ladder on top of me. But my good fortune did not forsake me, and although I was obliged to pause frequently during the ascent, and although my hands were cut in spite of my thick gloves,

I reached at last the top of the rampart from which the glacier hung. Tired out, I threw myself down on a patch of lichen, and fell asleep. When I awoke it was moonlight, and as I looked about me to see the configuration of the ledge on which I lay, I noticed this edelweiss. I had been sleeping with the treasure I sought at my hand."

"Exactly like the picture of the chamois hunter," exclaimed Charlotte.

"Eh?—quite so," said Aveland in an arid tone; "it's a curious coincidence."

"I declare," said Charlotte, "that this exploit of yours is worthy of a place in a modern novel of adventure."

"Oh!" rejoined Aveland, "Africa is not the only country where strange things happen. I lay dozing till the dawn, and then without much difficulty found one of the chamois paths and descended in one-sixth of the time I had taken to go up."

"And what did you eat?" queried Charlotte.

"Nothing till I got down," was the reply. "I had entirely forgotten hunger in my excitement. And now," he continued, rising, and depositing the edelweiss on a small table that stood beside Charlotte, "you have your heart's desire—an edelweiss obtained at the risk of a man's life. Much good may it do you."

"How bulky it is," said Charlotte.

"Yes; it is bulky," Aveland assented, "I brought a lot of earth with it, the edelweiss fades so rapidly."

"And why did you put so much paper about it?"

"To keep it dry—I mean, to keep it moist and cool. The sun as I got into warmer regions would have dried the earth and the roots."

"How thoughtful of you to take all this paper up with you!" said Charlotte ingenuously.

Aveland did not reply; but stole a side glance at Laura Ruthven. The utter solemnity with which both ladies had received

his Munchhausen-like story, intended for their amusement, was very annoying.

"Your hands seem to have healed very rapidly," said Charlotte, beginning slowly to unwind the wrapping of the edelweiss.

"Mere scratches!" said Aveland.

"And your Alpine suit looks as if it had come fresh from the tailor."

"Oh!" said Aveland with some confusion, "I—of course, I changed my clothes when I came down."

"Then you have two climbing suits?"

"Eh—no; I went up as I was when I left you, and—I have no other change but this."

"But you didn't forget to take your gloves."

"No—no; I was wise enough to take them."

"You expected, of course, that you would require to climb a hanging glacier?"

Aveland seemed about to reply, but Charlotte did not give him time.

"What a gem of an edelweiss!" she cried.

"And, only look, Laura, it's in a flower-pot. I

can't conceive how you managed to carry the flower-pot up the glacier, Mr. Aveland."

"I didn't do that," said Aveland, pulling his moustache. "I had it potted when I came down.—D—n the waiter!" he added internally.

"How thoughtful of you," said Charlotte. "I wish I knew how to thank you."

"Perhaps you could best thank him," said Laura Ruthven, smiling sweetly, "by believing the whole of his story."

"How so, Mrs. Ruthven?" asked Aveland. "Do you think it incredible?" Since they were taking it seriously, he would be hanged if he wouldn't do so too.

"Are you sure you did not dream some of it at the top of your Staubbach-like glacier?"

"It is certain," said Aveland, "that I did not dream any of it there or anywhere else. I have the clearest vision of the whole thing in my mind's eye. No dream could have left such a distinct impression."

"Your graphic description has given us the

most vivid impression of your—imaginary adventure, too,” said Charlotte.

“Imaginary!” cried Aveland.

“Yes,” said Charlotte. “I am very angry with you, Willie Aveland. I compliment you on your invention, and would have laughed over it with you, had you had the good grace to confess, when you saw the flower-pot in which I commissioned the waiter to put the edelweiss which you commissioned him to procure.”

“How? Explain what you mean,” said Aveland coolly, recovering at once from his confusion.

“I will,” said Charlotte, “and I expect your admiration. I saw you in close confabulation with a waiter shortly after you left us yesterday. I took the same waiter aside an hour afterwards, and said to him boldly—for I thought I understood you, Master Willie, and the result has proved it—‘By-the-bye, Mr. Aveland wishes that edelweiss in a pot and well wrapped

in newspaper. You'll not forget.' And he didn't, you see."

There was silence for fully a minute.

"I used to recite a poem by Leigh Hunt called 'The Glove and the Lions,' when I was at school. Do you know it?" asked Aveland, looking, as he felt, master of the situation.

"I remember it vaguely," said Charlotte.

"The knight," said Aveland, "leaps among the lions to recover the glove the lady had dropped to test the truth of his professions of love, and reproves her by flinging it in her face."

"I understand your application," said Charlotte with sparkling eyes. "You reprove me for desiring you to risk your life by flinging this absurd story at me. It's an ingenious way out of your difficulty, Mr. Aveland; but it won't serve, because you know that I jested. But let me ask you, do you ever read Browning?"

"I can't say I do; he's too difficult."

"I find him rather difficult, too," said Charlotte. "He's a sort of an island-like glacier; it's almost impossible to find a straight path and keep your footing sometimes in his poems. But he has a quite comprehensible one on this same subject of the glove and the lions, in which he defends the lady, and points out that the man who brags about braving death is just he who would insult a lady when she gives him an opportunity of risking his life."

"Everything has two sides," said Aveland, rather crestfallen; "and you're awfully rough on me. I don't feel like a knight a bit, now."

"How could you expect us to believe such an absurd story?" asked Laura Ruthven.

"I didn't expect you to believe it," replied Aveland.

"Why are you so annoyed now, then?" asked Charlotte.

"Well, I thought that you would believe I had at least procured the edelweiss, without

crediting all the details. I admit that," said Aveland, laughing with some constraint.

"But how can we believe you now? That's the second explanation you've offered," said Charlotte.

"Oh, well," said Aveland, capitulating. "My imagination ran away with me. I meant to tell a plausible story, but I hadn't thought it out well enough, and these things occurred to me and I couldn't resist them. You've had the best of this all along the line. I ask your pardon, Mrs. Ruthven—Charlotte."

"Granted," said the ladies in one breath.

"I shall remove that—trophy," he said, rising and leaving the room with the flower-pot in his hands.

"I don't believe I've succeeded," said Charlotte Walton. "That young man is capable of anything."

"Oh, he can't possibly come to either of us as a wooer now," said Laura Ruthven.

“Can’t he! The man who could climb a hanging glacier could woo the coldest of our sex if the edelweiss of a big bank account were to be won.”

CHAPTER XIX.

A RENCONTRE.

WALT WHITMAN says : " That is nothing that is quelled by one or two failures, or any number of failures." Aveland was not by any means " nothing " as far as the object that brought him to Switzerland was concerned. He had been careless, but it was the carelessness of confidence. The ground he had lost he felt certain he could redeem in an hour's time. If anyone had told him that he had lost no ground because he had not attained to any standing in Laura Ruthven's regard, he would have laughed his critic to scorn. He knew that he was handsome, that his manners were agreeable, and he flattered himself that he had never met any woman whose heart he had

failed to interest when he chose to spread his plumes. Instead of being annoyed at the difficulty he had put in his way, he felt that the absurd disadvantage at which he had placed himself gave a zest to his suit, as it supplied an obstacle in an undertaking which without it would have been mere child's play. Bent on the immediate rehabilitation of his character, he waylaid the ladies in the evening, and accompanied them to view the fall of Zischenblochsenheim, the show place of the locality.

"Do you know, Mr. Aveland," said Charlotte Walton, as they walked along the shore of Lake Himmels-Wasser, at the upper end of which the famous Zischenblochsenheim Fall is precipitated from a height of five hundred feet, "I think, after all, your invention showed very poorly in that edelweiss adventure."

"You forgave that," said Aveland with quiet emphasis.

Charlotte blushed—ever so little, but it was a blush. "Satan reproving sin," she muttered.

In Aveland's presence, however, she never referred again to the edelweiss.

When they came within sight of the fall they stood silent for half a minute, during which Aveland watched Laura Ruthven keenly.

"You are wondering, Mrs. Ruthven," he said, "why this does not impress you more?"

"I am," was the reply. "Are you a thought-reader?"

"How innocent you are, Laura!" said Charlotte Walton. "That is how everybody feels in presence of waterfalls and great pictures, except the scientific admirers who can turn on the exact quantity of words required, and the universal gushers who see Niagara in every thimblefull of water that's spilt among the Alps. If you hadn't been here you would have been mistaking Mr. Aveland for a wizard. That's just the way all sensible persons feel when they see for the first time a thing that's inordinately bragged of."

"In your great wisdom can you tell us why

that's how every person feels in presence of 'a thing that's bragged of'?" asked Aveland, somewhat nettled. "Don't," he continued before Charlotte could speak, "don't repeat that fudge about people's imagining something finer or grander than the reality. People never imagine anything about the things they go to see. For example, neither you nor Mrs. Ruthven pictured this fall in your imaginations for a single second. You came to see it; it's the thing to do; here you are, and it strikes you as being inferior. Can you explain it?"

"It is just," said Charlotte Walton, "the infinite capacity of the human mind which—if you were a religious man—you would know can be satisfied with nothing less than the whole universe."

"How do you know I'm not a religious man? But these sweeping statements have never any meaning for me. The order is too large to be completed in threescore years and ten. Mrs. Ruthven, will you allow me to ask you if you

have any idea why you are not filled with awe and amazement in presence of this fall ? ”

“ My idea is the very reverse of Mrs. Walton’s,” said Laura Ruthven. “ I think it is because my capacity is not equal to it ; and the want I feel is in myself, not in the waterfall.”

Of the two recognised methods of entertaining the female mind, Aveland preferred paradox to fun, and he was in the habit of launching out into such a discussion as the above without really knowing what he was going to say, in the full confidence that some *bizarre* presentation of the matter would suggest itself. Whether or not the paradox had occurred in the present instance we cannot say, for he grasped at once at the chance of flattering Laura Ruthven which her remark gave him.

“ That is what I would have tried to say,” he said, “ but even if I had dared to put it so directly, I couldn’t have expressed it so well.

It is only once or twice in a lifetime that we are equal to the great things of Nature."

"You read Ruskin as well as Tyndall," said Charlotte Walton sweetly.

"*You* read too much," said Aveland, with a spice of anger.

Charlotte laughed; and then Laura Ruthven said, changing the subject, "I do not know whether it is snobbish or not, but the things that everybody looks at—pictures and statues as well as waterfalls—always seem to me to be soiled."

"Yes," said Charlotte, "as if they had been exposed in Nature's shop-window till they had become faded and a little 'fly-blown.'"

The conversation was slipping out of Aveland's control, which he didn't at all want. He made no allusion to the last remark of the ladies, but reverted to one of his own.

"Do you remember," he asked Laura Ruthven, "those times in your life when you felt yourself on a level with Nature?"

"Ah!" said a mellow voice behind them, "is Saul also among the prophets?"

The three wheeled round, and Aveland exclaimed aloud, and Laura Ruthven mentally, "Lady Fullalove!"

"I like to wander about the world all alone sometimes," said Lady Fullalove, in reply to Aveland's interrogative glance. "Is that Mrs. Ruthven?" she asked, looking at Laura, who had gone a few steps nearer the waterfall. Charlotte kept her place, watching with great interest.

"Yes," said Aveland.

"I thought I recognised her," said Lady Fullalove. Then she raised her voice and made a speech. "You were speaking of Nature, and our kinship with Nature, and the rarity of those occasions on which we feel it. Alas! it is true, too true of the world at large; but there are a few simple men and women among whom, unworthy as I am, I am proud to number myself, with whom it is the excep-

tion to be out of sympathy with Nature even at her highest. Nature thinks: Nature's thoughts can be transferred to a receptive mind—a mind sensitised by belief. What is registered in terms of ordinary consciousness as an impression, the psychometer receives as a thought fresh from the mind of Nature. But, perhaps I am not appreciated, or not understood. I hope you will excuse me, Mr. Aveland, but your remark just now about being on a level with Nature tempted me to sow the good seed."

"On the contrary," said Aveland, who knew Lady Fullalove only slightly, and was not prepared to offend her, "you interest me very much."

"Do I?" cried Lady Fullalove, enraptured. "If I could only bring you over to our views. Look at these cliffs, Mr. Aveland; bare, naked rock they seem, and yet hard and cold as they appear, they are as living and warm as the brain of a human being. They are a part of Nature's memory. A shadow, Mr. Aveland,

never falls upon a wall, even an artificial wall, mark you, without leaving a permanent trace, a photograph restorable by the glance of a psychometer. Not an atom of matter but has its picture or pictures ; every atom is, as it were, an eye, able to depict within itself millions of objects at a time."

"Water?" said Aveland laconically, indicating the rushing torrent.

"Water? Ah yes, water," said Lady Fullalove meditatively. "Water reflects the sky, and the stars, and the sun, and the moon, and the purple cups of the mountain anemones, and the blue gentians, like little sapphires. Ah! it must be delightful to be water!" And Lady Fullalove extended her shapely arms as if about to melt into a river like a second Arethusa.

"Yes! but the waterfall there, coming down in front of us," persisted Aveland. "It doesn't seem to me to be reflecting anything; it's in far too great a hurry."

"It is reflecting us, Mr. Aveland, and Mrs.

Ruthven and this lady. Every drop of that water depicts us, and carries our likenesses down this stream into the Aar, and the Aar into the Rhine, and the Rhine into the North Sea. In a week's time our aqueous photographs may be laving the shores of our native land. Think of it, Mr. Aveland!"

"I will," said Aveland.

"Let me look at you more closely," said Lady Fullalove.

She advanced upon Aveland, who withstood the charge, cool but dubious, and looked into his eyes. Her own were handsome orbs, deep, black, and burning, and Aveland's coolness did not last long; he returned Lady Fullalove's gaze admiringly.

"Ah!" she said, "you have the root of the matter, I believe. I think you are capable of the truest, highest joys possible in this sublunar sphere. I feel my whole soul go out to you. I shall test you—I shall test you. What is your first name?"

“William.”

“Do you understand me,” said Lady Fullalove in a loud whisper, “when I say, William Aveland, meet me here at twelve o’clock to-night?”


“I think I do,” said Aveland in an undertone, casting a furtive glance at Charlotte Walton.

“I would give you a more ethereal *rendezvous*, but it would be beyond you. At midnight. *Au revoir*.”

Waving her hand, Lady Fullalove turned away, and her tall lithe figure was soon lost to view.

“Laura, Laura!” cried Charlotte Walton.

Laura Ruthven during Aveland’s conversation with Lady Fullalove had continued moving very slowly towards the waterfall. Charlotte’s cry stopped her progress, and she waited until the others had overtaken her. As soon as they were by her side she took several rapid steps forward, evidently desirous of avoiding conversation; but Mrs. Walton stopped her.



"Don't you want to know the news?" she said. "Come back; if we go any nearer we shall not be able to hear ourselves speak."

Reluctantly Laura Ruthven returned, and looking somewhat defiantly at Charlotte Walton and Aveland, sat down on a rock.

"What news?" queried Aveland with ill-disguised anxiety.

"The news of you," said Charlotte, laughing.

Aveland frowned, and signalled to Charlotte to be silent; but she laughed again, and shook her head at him.

"Mr. Aveland has made a conquest," she said to Laura with a theatrical gesture, "and the assignation is arranged; the hour—midnight; the place—here."

"Midnight is Lady Fullalove's chosen time," said Laura Ruthven, staring before her.

"I swear by everything that's sacred," said Aveland hotly, "that there is no assignation. 'You're a little, meddling fool, Charlotte,' he added beneath his breath.

"With these ears, and they do not commonly deceive me," said Charlotte Walton, still theatrically, "I heard Lady Fullalove invite you to meet her here to-night, and you—said you understood."

"Pshaw!" cried Aveland; "the woman's a fool."

"But you can't deny it," persisted Charlotte.

"Well, well," said Aveland; "did I say I would go."

"No—to be honest," replied Charlotte; "but you looked it," she added to herself.

"Nor shall I," said Aveland.

"You won't go?" cried Laura Ruthven, starting from her rock.

"No, Mrs. Ruthven," said Aveland with an air of injured innocence; "not even if I had not met you." He succeeded also in expressing by voice and gesture the double meaning he intended to convey in the second part of his answer, although Charlotte Walton alone noticed it.

"I am very glad indeed," rejoined Laura Ruthven—to the mystification of Charlotte and the delighted surprise of Aveland.

"Lady Fullalove is commonly supposed to be half mad," said Aveland to Charlotte Walton.

"It must be her friends who have spread that report," said Laura Ruthven quietly.

"Why do you think so?" asked Aveland with a mingled deference and tenderness of tone, which Charlotte Walton observed and laughed at in her sleeve.

"Because," said Laura Ruthven, "madness, like charity, covers a multitude of sins."

"Ah! yes," rejoined Aveland. "Lady Fullalove, I have heard, has—well, a past."

"Yes," assented Laura almost fiercely. She seemed about to say more, but checked herself.

"Here comes the crowd," said Charlotte Walton. "I hear the band too. Shall we remain?"

"No; I wish to get back at once," said Laura Ruthven, much to Aveland's annoyance.

"But it is very amusing," he said, "and the band is not half bad. It plays Strauss—it warbles Strauss as 'twere a hundred-throated nightingale. You remember the *Vision of Sin*?" This was one of Aveland's crack quotations. "Then in an hour or less it will be dark, and we shall have the illumination. Really, it's very amusing; the remarks of the crowd are more gorgeous than the fireworks. They recognise the scene at once; it's so natural, you know; Drury Lane couldn't produce anything finer. They haven't enough real water, you see."

"I quite believe it is very amusing," said Laura Ruthven; "but I wish to return. Would you like to stay, Charlotte? I can find my way back alone easily."

Aveland saw it at once; he had an eye like a hawk for the faintest flutter of a handkerchief. Ladies daren't *throw* it, he knew; but he also knew—the cunning fellow!—that the dear creatures are like patent self-registering targets; they can't help themselves when you've made a

bull's-eye—that is, touched their hearts—out comes a flash of white ; it may be “brief as the lightning in the collied night,” but the experienced marksman can read the sign.

“Charlotte would like it,” he said with sparkling eyes, “and we can have a talk over old times. Of course I can’t allow you to return alone, Mrs. Ruthven. We’ll find Charlotte a comfortable seat. You won’t mind waiting till I come back, will you?”

That was Aveland’s reply to the flash of white he thought he had noticed in Laura Ruthven’s proposal to return alone.

Charlotte Walton looked askance at Laura Ruthven, and Laura Ruthven looked askance at Charlotte Walton. Laura had not the remotest intention of allowing Aveland to accompany her ; but she wanted to hear what Charlotte had to say. Charlotte, on her part, did not quite understand her friend, and had stumbled on the notion from her expression of pleasure at Aveland’s decision not to keep the

appointment Lady Fullalove had made, that Laura Ruthven had no objection to a mild flirtation with the young diplomatist. Neither lady said anything, expecting the other's reply. Aveland looked from one to the other and pulled his moustache. "By Jove," he thought, "the little widow's caught, and she's afraid to let her friend see it." At last the silence, which was becoming awkward, was broken by Laura Ruthven.

"If you wish to stay, I'll stay too, Charlotte," she said in a manner from which there was no appeal.

"I've no desire to stay," said Charlotte with a little yawn, relieved on Laura's account, and ashamed that she should have harboured for a moment the suspicion that had crossed her mind.

Aveland was quite at a loss. He accompanied the ladies on their way back silently for a hundred yards, and then when he was beginning to feel it necessary to say something

they found themselves breasting the full stream of visitors, in the midst of whom marched the band, playing an orchestral setting of the "Ranz des Vaches." Conversation was practically impossible until they reached the hotel. At the entrance the ladies stopped.

"Good-night, Mr. Aveland," said Laura Ruthven. "Don't forget," she added significantly.

Aveland bowed low as he took her hand.

Then Laura Ruthven hurried away to her own room, leaving Aveland and Charlotte to wonder and conjecture as they chose. The latter did not allow Aveland to discuss her friend's conduct, although he was very persistent in an endeavour to extract all the information he could about the young widow.

"We can't stand here all night," said Charlotte Walton, "and as I'm not going to the drawing-room, I'll say—I ought to say *good-bye*, William Aveland." The sudden emphasis on the last words, in the tone, as well as in the

break that preceded them, struck Aveland like a blow from the shoulder.

"What do you mean?" he asked anxiously.

"I mean that if I thought you had the remotest chance of success I would never see you again, nor let Mrs. Ruthven see you."

"You think I haven't a chance?"

"Not a particle."

"I think you're wrong," he replied; "I've no chance if you represent me, of course; but, since you're so confident that I sha'n't have a place, you needn't get me scratched, you know."

"I'm quite confident you're merely throwing away time."

"I've always plenty of time," said Aveland. "Too much often nowadays; I can't get rid of it when I want to. I would sell out a good few shares with pleasure in that old-established business, but the managing partner with the scythe and the forelock doesn't trade that way now."

"There used to be a famous old broker in these stocks," said Charlotte.

"I know whom you mean. I believe I would sign a bill in my own blood in favour of that same ancient accommodator, payable in ten or fifteen years, for some things I want."

"And so, because you can't sell your soul to the devil for a few luxurious years, you would like to marry Laura Ruthven."

"You always had your knife in me, Charlotte; but you know quite well I'm not so bad a lot."

"Oh, you're quite good enough for me; but, you know, they say I'm too tolerant."

"You'll not interfere, Charlotte?" pleaded Aveland.

"I'll not interfere, because you haven't a chance, as I told you."

"Tell me honestly why you think so."

"Because—because you are a fallen angel, William Aveland."

"Where will you get a man that isn't?"

"Ah, Willie ! that question shows how deeply you have fallen."

"Your little friend might raise me," said Aveland with a humility that astonished Charlotte. "Do you know," he added in an intense whisper, "I think that this tough, tanned heart of mine has a soft corner in it still ; I believe I have fallen in love with little Laura Ruthven."

"Have you really ?" asked Charlotte Walton. She had a true sisterly feeling for Aveland, and he knew that ; and he knew also how all women will pardon a man almost anything if he can show himself still capable of the one sentiment that women can truly understand.

"I've been thinking over my life of late," said Aveland sorrowfully, "and it seems to me that it's providential my coming to Switzerland just now and meeting you, and having my past brought back to me, and falling in love with an angel like Laura Ruthven."

Hypocrisy became him ill, but Charlotte

Walton, with all her shrewdness, mistook the bad grace with which he acted for a sign of contrition.

"I don't think you've any chance, Willie," she said.

"But you will let me try, won't you?"

"I'll not stand in your way. But what a place to be talking like this in."

"I've noticed," said Aveland, "that serious conversations always do crop up accidentally on doorsteps at the last moment."

"Are you coming in?"

"No, I'm going to smoke."

"Good-night, Willie."

"Good-night, Charlotte ; and—well, I won't ask you to say a good word for me."

"I couldn't ; but I'll not say a bad one."

A minute after Charlotte Walton had gone, Aveland also entered the hotel. "Now," he said to himself, "I'll have a brandy and soda, and go and see what the Fullalove's up to,"

CHAPTER XX.

CROSS PURPOSES.

CHARLOTTE WALTON went straight to her own room ; she was not angry with Laura Ruthven ; but she was sorry that she had not her friend's full confidence. Long before the meeting with Lady Fullalove at the fall of Zischenblochsenheim Charlotte had half divined the cause of her friend's secret sorrow. The concentrated bitterness of tone in which Laura Ruthven had said after Lady Fullalove's departure, "Midnight is Lady Fullalove's chosen hour," returned to Charlotte in the solitude of her room, and enabled her to complete her divination. She felt strongly inclined to go to her friend, tell her she had fathomed her secret, and comfort her with her affection ; but her

self-respect forbade her. Laura Ruthven had of her own accord slipped the leash of their companionship for the time being, and Charlotte would wait for her voluntary return.

She had not long to wait. A tap at the door, the rustle of a dress, a few rapid steps, and Laura Ruthven was on her knees at her friend's side. Our heroine sobbed a little on Charlotte's breast, and then she told her story.

"It is more than flesh and blood can endure," she added, "to see this shameless witch going about the world, careless and happy, making stepping-stones to her pleasures of the hearts of honest women. I must punish her somehow, Charlotte; it is bare justice that she should suffer."

"How could you punish her, dear?" asked Charlotte Walton.

"I don't know; but it is a shame that she should escape. She will at least be disappointed to-night, but the rest of her life should be one long disappointment."

“How will she be disappointed to-night?”

“Mr. Aveland promised me *not* to meet her at the waterfall.”

“Oh! I forgot that. Yes.”

“Charlotte, do you know what I want to do?”

“No, dear. Something dreadful from the way you speak and look.”

“I want to go and meet Lady Fullalove to-night at twelve o'clock, and speak my mind to her;” and as Laura Ruthven said that, Charlotte Walton remembered and understood the pleasure which her friend had shown when Aveland announced his determination not to meet Lady Fullalove. “Don't begin to argue; I must do it. You remember when she called on me; well, I spoke very strongly to her then, but she laughed, and sneered at me, and patronised me. I think I could move her now. I have brooded on what to say to her ever since she called, and I shall make her writhe this time; and I want to be done with it all, too.

I think if I could just get speech of her again I could empty my heart of this misery, and be as happy as I try to seem. You know, I vowed vengeance on Lady Fullalove ; but what can I do? It is only harming myself ; for dreadful things come into my head sometimes at night. I once wished—perhaps I didn't wish it—I hope I didn't wish it ; but the idea was there before me, how easy it would have been in olden times to hire a man to stab her dead. It must end. The desire to injure Lady Fullalove grows stronger, the surer I become that it is wrong, and the more I feel my powerlessness to harm her. If I could meet her to-night, I think I could empty my heart of the whole misery. I couldn't go alone. Will you come with me?"

"Yes, dear, if you wish it," said her friend.

Laura Ruthven thanked her friend with kisses. "It will be some punishment to Lady Fullalove," she said, "to meet me to-night instead of Mr. Aveland."

She harped on that string for a little longer, and then the two friends wrapped themselves up and went out.

The moon was full, and high up in heaven. A few heavy but broken clouds drifted rapidly across its face. Through the rents in the clouds the silver light shifted about the dark, pine-clad sides of the Pinselburg, as if thrown from a moving mirror. Sometimes the gleam lit upon the snowy summit, but it was immediately withdrawn; the blaze was too dazzling even for the sportive goddess who flashed the supple light. The noise of the waterfall, although it was several hundred yards away, trebled by the silence of the night, boomed in their ears as soon as they stepped from the hotel, louder than when they had stood in front of it in the evening. It was like the hoarse, homely lullaby of mother earth, to which the trees, the rocks, the mountains would soon have fallen asleep but for the flashing of the moon's elfish beams. They met several stragglers,

and heard the voices of others breaking, or hardly breaking, the hollow roar of the water. It was not yet midnight when they arrived at the spot where Lady Fullalove had invited Aveland to meet her ; so they withdrew into the shadow of a rock to await the appointed time. On the expiry of some ten minutes, during which neither had spoken a word, Laura Ruthven said, " There will be some difficulty in being understood here, especially if the listener is not accustomed to one's voice."

She spoke in an ordinary tone, and the fact that she had to repeat her remark proved the correctness of her surmise. As Lady Fullalove could only come by one way, they moved down the river bank for a considerable distance. Having tested the acoustics of the place where they paused and found them satisfactory, they again hid themselves from ordinary observation, this time under the branches of a tree.

The loveliness of the night, the deep music of the water, the strangeness of the circum-

stance and of the scene, all combined to dispel the passionate anger which had led Laura Ruthven to undertake this expedition. She felt her well-thought-out, elaborate impeachment of Lady Fullalove slipping from her memory, and was about to propose to Charlotte an immediate return, when a figure appeared, rapidly moving towards them. She grasped her friend's arm, and the motion of her heart increased, until its acceleration affected her breathing.

"Let her pass," she whispered. "I do not want to meet her."

"Very well," said Charlotte Walton; "but do not disappoint yourself."

Laura Ruthven thought again. Would it disappoint her not to meet Lady Fullalove? Would she still be haunted daily by the desire to wither this woman with a burning speech? Could she not blot her out of her memory forever? She feared not; it might be better to meet her and "have it out." But she had for-

gotten all she had intended to say ; and if she stood forth to meet Lady Fullalove unprepared, she felt that the height, bulk, *sangfroid*, and infidel opinions of the wandering amazon would paralyse her powers of thought and utterance. Then her pride suggested that she would fall very low in Charlotte's eyes if she showed the white feather. She did not wait until another revulsion of feeling might have changed her intention.

"Come," she said, dragging Charlotte forward, "we will go and meet her."

"That's better," said Charlotte Walton approvingly.

Hardly had they stepped into the path than they saw that the approaching figure was that of a man.

"Willie Aveland!" said Charlotte Walton. "This is how he keeps his promises."

Aveland it was, advancing confidently towards the trysting-place. When he saw the forms of *two* ladies he paused, but only for a

second. He did not recognise them in the moonlight, and thought that Lady Fullalove had brought her maid with her. Lifting his hat he came rapidly forward.

"Stand still," said Charlotte Walton. "I will meet him, and he will mistake me for Lady Fullalove."

"You're not tall enough," said Laura Ruthven.

"I'll risk it," said Charlotte, and she moved briskly towards the advancing scapegrace, muffling her face as she went.

"You come most carefully upon your hour," she said when Aveland reached her.

"Charlotte!" cried Aveland in dismay, recognising her at once, in spite of her feigned voice. "Is that Mrs. Ruthven?" he added, before his old friend could reply.

"It is," said Charlotte Walton. "If you had any chance before, Master Willie, you've destroyed it now; and you have, as you must feel after what you said to me to-night, sunk very low in my opinion."

"But think," said Aveland, quite off his guard; "I couldn't possibly let any woman come and wait here for me at midnight. I assure you I came only to take her home, and bid her a respectful farewell."

"It's utterly useless to say that either to me or to Mrs. Ruthven," said Charlotte Walton with decision. "You promised Mrs. Ruthven and me that you would not come here, and that of your own accord. If you loved Mrs. Ruthven you would have kept that promise, and been at this very moment sighing beneath the window of her—unoccupied room."

"Very fine indeed," said Aveland, adopting rather a blustering tone. "But I should like to know what you two are doing here."

"We are hear as your proxies to meet Lady Fullalove."

At this point Laura Ruthven, who had soon seen that Charlotte had been unable to sustain the disguise, came forward and said, "I am

sorry you did not feel yourself bound to keep your promise, Mr. Aveland."

"So is Mr. Aveland," said Charlotte Walton without a moment's hesitation, "since he finds you here."

"How so?" inquired Laura Ruthven, absolutely unconscious of Aveland's intentions.

"He can tell you himself," said Charlotte Walton, "while I go and watch for Lady Fullalove."

"She has primed her against me, the little vixen!" thought Aveland as Charlotte moved away a dozen yards in the direction of the hotel.

"Have you noticed," he said, pulling all his wits together, "that Mrs. Walton is deeply tinged with cynicism?"

"She is caustic, sometimes," replied Laura Ruthven, "but I do not think her at all cynical."

"Perhaps not," said Aveland. "I judge her by her quite erroneous opinion of myself. I hope you do not agree with her."

"I never heard her express any opinion of you," said Laura Ruthven.

Aveland was relieved.

"She is a lady willing to take a considerable share of responsibility," he said.

"What makes you say that, now?" asked Laura Ruthven.

"Because she knows that in the next few minutes the future happiness or unhappiness of at least one of us is to be decided."

"I understand what you mean," said Laura Ruthven coldly in spite of her amazement; "but I can hardly believe my ears. Are you not here, sir, to meet Lady Fullalove?"

"Pray, Mrs. Ruthven," said Aveland with great gravity, "interpret my conduct in a just spirit. Would you have had me leave Lady Fullalove alone here—perhaps for an hour?—there's no saying how long she would have waited. I came—"

He was about to repeat the falsehood with which he had already failed to deceive Charlotte

Walton, but he felt, as he encountered Laura Ruthven's fixed gaze, that the lie would be wasted, and he saw clearly that Charlotte Walton was right when she told him he had no chance. Without finishing his sentence, without another word, he turned and walked away. As he passed Charlotte Walton he said, "If I didn't believe that you had nothing to do with this I would throttle you;" and he was so angry that he almost meant it.

Charlotte Walton looked after him and shook her head twice as she said, "Poor Willie." He had not gone many steps when he returned.

"What is it that you two women mean?" he asked almost frantically. "You tricked me about the edelweiss, you trick me now; you have befooled me, you have played with me as if I were a green girl. I'm hanged if I understand it. What the devil are you doing here?"

"Perhaps we are playing at the 'Merry Wives of Windsor,'" said Charlotte Walton with twinkling eyes.

"And what trick are you playing off on Lady Fullalove? I should be glad to know that ; and if I can help you, command me," said Aveland.

"You *can* help us," said Laura Ruthven, whose courage had risen with the excitement of the meeting with Aveland, and who was now determined to "have it out" with her former rival, "if you can go away by a path on which you will not encounter Lady Fullalove, because we have something to say to her here."

"Well," said Aveland, rather crestfallen, as he had not expected the required service to be of such a negative kind, "I think I can. A little further on there is the beginning of a foot-path which takes a circuit round the meadow."

"Oh! we shall be very grateful if you will go that way," said Laura Ruthven.

"I will, then," rejoined Aveland. "But," he continued, looking at his watch ; "it's already half-past twelve. My experience of—" he paused with a gasp.

"Go on," said Charlotte. "Of assignments,

Willie. Go on—teaches you—won't you go on?—that the lady, if she comes at all, is never—unpunctual. Isn't that it?"

Aveland nodded.

"So we may be almost certain that Lady Fullalove will not appear to-night."

"Quite," said Aveland. "It's my impression," he continued, "that she has seen us from a distance, and gone away. It must be so," he added, perceiving that if it were not the case he must confess to having been twice tricked in one night; for he was fixed in his belief, not being able to account otherwise for the presence of the two ladies in such a place and at such a time, that Laura Ruthven and Charlotte Walton had laid a trap for him.

"We'll wait a little longer," said Laura Ruthven. "Please go, Mr. Aveland."

Mr. Aveland went in silence, and the ladies watched him out of sight.

"How long do you mean to wait, Laura?" asked Charlotte.

"Till one," answered Laura Ruthven resolutely.

Charlotte took her friend's arm, and they walked up and down the bank of the Zischenblochsenheim in the uncertain moonlight. The clouds continued to drift across the sky, and the fitful rays flashed along the pine-tops or glistened on the snow with a charming waywardness; sometimes they streamed up and down the lofty waterfall; sometimes they fell upon our heroine and her friend.

At first all Laura Ruthven's bitterness against Lady Fullalove increased in strength when it became apparent that she was not going to keep the appointment she herself had made. The wretched feeling caused by the reflection that she had put her friend and herself to all this trouble for nothing slowly passed away under the calming influence of the night, and she returned to the hotel in a much gentler mood than she had left it.

Next morning, on inquiring for Lady Fulla-

love, Aveland found that she had left the hotel about two hours after she had asked him to meet her at the waterfall. "The woman's mad, and I'm a fool," was his comment. Immediately after breakfast, having written a brief, but very vigorous note to Jack Shortish, he also took his departure from the Hotel Zimmermann, and the two young widows "saw him in Switzerland again no more."

There is nothing so cloying as honey ; this is a fact that is well known to the Swiss hotel-keeper, and that is why he is so very liberal with it at his breakfast table. Leathery mutton, stringy fowls and mysterious fish which are full of bones, and, like Lord Tom Noddy, are all head and no body, all cost money ; you wouldn't think it to look at them ; but they do—it's principally for carriage, though : the original cost, like the original cost of all the cheap and nasty things to be found in Switzerland, is infinitesimal. It is for this reason that the Swiss hotelkeeper is so very

liberal with his honey ; this is why the tourist, on going down to breakfast, is always confronted with the eternal glass honey-pot, which is ever lying in wait for him and seeking to be devoured. The hungry tourist, male or female, orders breakfast ; the waiter places the rolls on the table ; the atrocious dinner he swallowed the night before, or the mountain air, or the fact of his being in the land of the brave and the free, or a determination, perhaps, to have his money's worth, or possibly all these reasons together, have combined to make the tourist as hungry as a wolf. Fish, cutlets, *bifteek aux pommes*, "Certainly, he'll take all three of them, and look sharp." Then the waiter takes the lid from the honey-pot and informs the tourist that the honey is from the neighbouring mountains ; then he retires behind a screen and watches his victim.

"Honey from the mountains !" The thought is distinctly appetising. The tourist plunges his spoon into the honey jar, and then his fate

is sealed. There comes a time, though, when even sitting in a parlour eating bread-and-honey palls : the tourist begins to long, or as the Americans say, to hanker for the flesh-pots of Egypt in the shape of the leathery mutton, the stringy fowl, and the skeleton fish ; he summons the waiter, the waiter produces the coffee and vanishes with the celerity of a hob-goblin. Meanwhile the tourist being hungry continues to gorge himself with honey. After repeated summonses the waiter at length arrives with the bony fish. The tourist doesn't eat it, for if the truth be told there isn't anything to eat ; he simply toys with it in a pre-functory manner. Then the waiter arrives with the cutlets ; but the tourist waves him off. " Monsieur will try the biftek ? " but monsieur declines ; he has breakfasted. Then the waiter retires behind the screen and serves the tourist's cutlet and the biftek to somebody else, with a like result. Not that we believe that it was the honey-pot that caused our heroine and her

friend, Mrs. Walton, to leave their comfortable rooms in Herr Zimmermann's great hotel by the pretty Himmels-Wasser Lake. Willie Aveland had departed. He wasn't much, you'll say, but he was something. The two ladies had feasted their fill upon mountain scenery and mountain air ; they had made the regulation excursions ; they had been into ice caves ; they had ascended, climbed, toiled in the snow, and they had had a good doze of the sublime and beautiful ; they had seen the Zischenblochsenheim Fall illuminated till the only thing they perceived at last was the gaping crowd of tourists which did its best to make the place insupportable. They had rowed upon, they had sailed upon, they had fished in, the Himmels-Wasser Lake. In fact they had left undone nothing that Herr Zimmermann, the polite landlord, had told them was to be done. They began to feel like Alexander when he found there were no more worlds to conquer. They had read all the Tauchnitz novels they

had brought with them ; they made no acquaintances among the tourists, and they began to feel bored—a feeling of nostalgia, home sickness, or what the Anglo-Indian defines as “an irrepressible longing for cold beef and pickles.” The mountains seemed smaller and less imposing ; they had lost their grandeur and magnificence ; the Himmels-Wasser Lake seemed less blue, less beautiful ; the flower-maiden in the national costume, who was a very pretty girl, by the way, from Strassburg, and a private speculation of Herr Zimmermann, the proprietor of the hotel : “I bring her all ze way from Strassburg, ladies, to add to ze natural attractions of ze neighbourhood, because ze Swiss girl, she is of an ugliness of the most frightful ; they say it is ze snow-water,” Herr Zimmermann added mysteriously : even the Swiss flower-maiden from Strassburg had become uninteresting.

“Do you know, Laura,” said Mrs. Walton one morning at breakfast, “I’ve been wanting

to say it for a long time, but I haven't liked to—I think I've had enough of Switzerland."

"That is exactly what I've been burning to say for the last ten days, Charlotte ; it's dull, it's decidedly dull."

And then Mrs. Ruthven's maid was summoned, and the joys of packing commenced ; and within twenty-four hours the two ladies and their attendant had shaken the dust of the Swiss mountains from off their feet and were well on their way towards dear old England, that miserable country which we are so fond of abusing so loudly and so roundly, but which we are so very fond of getting back to all the same.

CHAPTER XXI.

AVELAND IS EXPATRIATED.

WE all know the Randolphian Club ; it's in St. Giles's Square ; its members are a little bit mixed ; there are stock-brokers among them, which is a dreadful thought to those members who are not stock-brokers ; but there is a deeper depth than this at the Randolphian, and it makes even the stock-brokers gnash their teeth with rage. Tell it not in Gath, kindly do not whisper it in the streets of Askalon, there is a grim phantom at the Randolphian that cannot be exorcised, that phantom is the Jew : they're haunted by a demon grim, so to say.

It was just the thin edge of the wedge that was carefully inserted when little Freddy Skey—

Freddy Skey, who was everybody's friend—was elected. Nobody knew anything about Skey *père*, whose real name was Mr. Zerubbabel, and who began life as a seller of sealing-wax on London Bridge, and died a millionaire. And all honour to him, we say ; we are not laughing at him not the least little bit ; we say that it did the rather grotesque old gentleman, with the long white beard and the natural lisp, the very highest possible credit ; it's far more difficult, when you begin with nothing at all except a lisp, to die a millionaire, than to walk across the dark continent (from purely philanthropic motives) and to "relieve," say, at least half-a-dozen reluctant Emins. It's the first mouse that always does it. Skey hadn't been in a month, before they elected Montmorency Campion, and others followed ; and in the end the Hebrew party ruled the Randolphian Club, reigned triumphant, and did just as they pleased—of course they did, because they stuck together. Jews are like Highlanders, they

always fight shoulder to shoulder, but without any exhortation to do so. There's a good deal of *Judenhetze* and intolerance still in this merry England of our's. One of us has a small nephew who came home from school the other day with a black eye which he attributed to little Maurice Solomonson ; as he informed his uncle, " I said something that annoyed him, and he's a bully is Solomonson." " What did you say, my boy ? " the indignant uncle asked. " I said," replied the young gentleman with the black eye,—

“ ‘ Take a piece of pork,
Put it on a fork,
And give it to the Hebrew Jew—
Ha-ha ! ’

and then Solomonson hit me in the eye ; and he's a bully." The uncle didn't sympathise, not the least little bit. Ignorant people, and the great majority of us are very ignorant indeed, are very fond of persecuting Jews ; it

isn't on the religious ground, though they may pretend it is ; it's jealousy, simple jealousy—pure and unadulterated. There's no doubt whatever that we are dreadfully jealous of Jews because they are specially favoured. Give the Jewish child a fair chance, and it grows up into a better-looking youth or maid than the average Christian boy or girl. Of course if, as we used to do in Europe, and as they still do in the conservative East, we can put the Jews into an unwholesome Ghetto, the Jewish child is stunted and handicapped morally and physically : but emancipate them and they come to the front at once. The Jew goes to the university, and inevitably elbows his way to the top of the tree ; in law and trade and commerce we can't compete with him ; in science the result is the same. In music, painting, literature, it is "Eclipse first and the rest nowhere," we don't say much about it, but we *know* that it is so. Another curious fact must be remembered, we have all met in-

numerable fools ; let us look back—did we ever meet a fool who was a Jew ? We look in vain. The foolish Jew is like the mysterious Mrs. Harris, “ there ain’t no sich person.” Then we are very fond of pretending that Jews are dishonest : take the criminal classes. The Hebrew who comes under the ban of the law is practically an infinitesimal quantity ; the Jew likes to have his bond, as do the rest of the human race, including even Mr. Pecksniff himself. Then let us take the Christian virtues. It shows a nice humility in our calling them the Christian virtues, and thereby tacitly denying their existence in the Jew. Who gives away the most in charity ? The Jew, and he gives it away as a matter of course, quietly, and without the usual flourish of trumpets. We hear a good deal about usury. A great many people look upon Shylock as a fiend in human form, instead of an unlucky old gentleman who was robbed of his ducats and his daughter by that particularly objection-

able "boulder" Lorenzo, who was simply a mediæval masher fond of sharpening his wits upon the aged and helpless.

The objection to the Randolphian Club is what is termed the Jewish element, and it was that fact that betrayed us into this long diatribe or divagation, or whatever you like to call it; but nevertheless the Randolphian is a capital place to dine at—it's as likely as not that they have "Kosher" cookery in the kitchen, which is uncommonly good eating, as those who have had the good fortune to taste it know very well; and the wines are right, and it's altogether a cheerful place. But there are other attractions at the Randolphian besides the mere food and wine; you can take a lady or ladies to the Randolphian, which makes all the difference in the world. When men dine alone, or with each other, when the board is not graced by the presence of ladies, men are apt to drink more than is good for them; the house-dinners at most of our clubs are very often nothing

more or less than gourmandising competitions ; they're but Homeric feasts after all, and there isn't much talk at them, save of the baldest description, though there is a good deal of wine drunk. Of course if you are entertaining an old friend, it's another matter ; but, as a rule, the unfortunates who dine in solitary state at their clubs, or sit down to the house-dinners that are so tastefully served, though they may be actually in evening dress with a flower in their button-hole, know that, in reality, they are sitting down in sackcloth and ashes to partake of Dead Sea apples. It's all very well to sit down with the skeleton to a set dinner, but a *tête-à-tête* meal with him is very gruesome.

Now at the Randolphian it's a very different thing altogether. The room in which ladies are entertained is perfectly charming : the little tables are quite sufficiently far apart to make the *partie carrée* or the little *tête-à-tête* dinner thoroughly private ; the whole thing is perfectly proper, highly respectable, and there is a

certainty of freedom from annoyance of any kind : while to the female mind there is a sort of delicate *soupeçon* of impropriety, a sort of scintilla of naughtiness, which in reality is utterly non-existent, but which gives additional flavour to the viands, and zest to the carefully selected wines. You see when you are dining with a lady at the Randolphian Club, her mind is at rest, her jealousy can't be aroused and so interfere with her appetite, as may happen at a restaurant. If she sees some very elaborately-dressed woman at an adjoining table who may be admiring the decorations or the splendour of the electric light, she knows that that lady is in society ; she doesn't suspect her of wishing to make advances to her own particular entertainer ; and consequently her food doesn't (figuratively speaking of course) go the wrong way, and turn to gall and wormwood ; and that's one of the things that makes it so charming to dine with ladies at the Randolphian, because their minds are at rest. Another

thing is that they don't merely feed you, but, for a consideration, your table is artistically decorated with fresh flowers, which is ever so much nicer than those dreadful painted properties at the feast, the poor, dusty, dirty artificial flowers which seem to have been rescued from a cast-off bonnet of the season before last.

Mr. Aveland had been very particular indeed about the composition of the *menu*, every man in this wicked world thinks he can order a dinner; it's easy enough to order something to eat *for men*, to compose what is called a bill of fare; but in ordering a dinner for a couple of women, a great deal of taste, or the want of it, may be displayed. Mr. Aveland hadn't been in the Diplomatic Service of his country for nothing; in ordering a dinner he knew what he was about; in ordering a dinner for ladies, he was at his very best. I'm afraid he had ordered a good many dinners for ladies, this wicked Mr. Aveland. He knew very well that

the proper thing was *potage à la rein*. Don't think we are going to give you the *menu* in detail. It was a light dinner; there were plenty of what the French call *friandises*, which are what an alderman would call foreign kick-shaws, and despise: accordingly there was just one glass of old East India sherry, sparkling Moselle iced, and plenty of it; *Punch à la Romaine*, which no lady has ever been known to refuse ever since the delicious compound was invented, probably by some prince of the church; pastry, coffee, and maraschino.

For this little dinner at the Randolphian had been a sort of peace-offering. William Aveland had been what he called "doomed to Japan;" that is to say, his appointment as one of the secretaries at Yokohama had been signed; he had to go, he couldn't get out of it. But he determined to make his peace with the two young widows before he went. "Charlie," said Aveland—he always called Mrs. Walton so when he wanted a favour "for old time's sake,"

as he used to put it—"I want you and Mrs. Ruthven to forgive me. I shall come back ugly; if I ever come back at all, I shall come back short and stout, and the corners of my eyes will point upwards; I shall, in fact, resemble the Koko of Mr. Grossmith—the effects of the Japanese climate are tremendous. You *will* think of me sometimes, won't you?" he said, with a comprehensive look that took in both ladies.

"We will promise never to forget you, Mr. Aveland," replied Mrs. Ruthven. "We shall never see a Japanese fan without recognising the portrait of our diplomatist, of our—shall I say departed *daimio*. Shall you perform the happy despatch, Mr. Aveland, if you find it dull?"

"I did that in Switzerland, Mrs. Ruthven," replied the young fellow sentimentally, "and you refuse me even the pleasures of hope. Women are always hard on *me*," he added with a deep sigh.

"Willie," said Mrs. Walton with a smile,

"do you know that I have heard you called the Solicitor General?"

"Was she pretty, Charlie?" replied the fatuous young man. "If she was pretty, I forgive her; if she wasn't, she'd no right to say it. If I'm a habitual sinner, I'm not unrepentant. And dreadful things are in store for me. The prettiest girls in Japan paint their lips green, isn't *that* awful to contemplate? Why don't girls here paint their lips green? It would keep fellows like me straight."

"We'll think of it, won't we, Laura," said Charlotte Walton.

Shortly afterwards Willie Aveland packed his two guests carefully away in Laura Ruthven's brougham. He squeezed their hands in mute farewell; and a day or two after the feather-brain Aveland left for Japan and the ladies with the green lips with a light heart. As he stepped on board the P. and O. boat at Brindisi, he muttered oracularly, "Widows have no hearts!"

CHAPTER XXII.

THE MOTHER OF GRACCHUS.

"CHARLOTTE," said Laura Ruthven one day, as the two young widows sat at lunch some weeks after their return from Switzerland, "I want a new sensation of some kind. Couldn't you introduce me to some interesting people?"

"What do you call interesting people?" asked Charlotte.

"People that do something."

"I agree with you that they are the most entertaining. The lilies of the field that neither toil nor spin are not so interesting after all, as Solomon in all his glory; he built the Temple, and wrote proverbs, and made a stir in his time. I am afraid we are useless lilies," said Charlotte.

"Oh, wait a little!" cried Laura Ruthven ;
"we haven't had time to find a career yet."

"What career can we possibly have now?
A wife has a career, and an old maid has a career, but what is there except women's rights and *philanthropy* for the young widow?—except philandering."

"Who knows?" said Laura Ruthven.

"And echo answers who.—Well now, what kind of people would you like to meet?"

"Let me see," said the other meditatively.
"I have met statesmen, and bishops, and novelists, and actors—one actor at anyrate—and soldiers, and doctors, and lawyers."

"A good selection," said Charlotte. "Did you ever meet an editor?"

"An editor?—no; and I never met anybody who had seen one."

"I have," said Charlotte laconically.

"Have you!" exclaimed Laura Ruthven.
"Was he interesting?"

"Yes ; I liked him very well ; said Charlotte patronisingly.

"Was he young ? "

"Not old. But I like his mother better."

"Is he married ? "

"No—or rather, yes ; he's married to his paper—to literature."

"Oh ! Does—does his wife support him ? "

"She would if required, but he doesn't need it."

"Then he's wealthy ? "

"Surely ; Mr. Tunstall, the editor and proprietor of the *Dreadnought* has plenty of money. Now, would you like to see him and his mother ? "

"Is his mother pleasant ? "

"A most delightful old lady. I haven't called for a long while ; but she'll be very glad to see me, and you for my sake."

"And shall we see her son ? "

"No ; but we shall hear about him."

"What do you mean ? "

“Will you come?”

Laura Ruthven thought for a second or two, and then consented.

They found Mrs. Tunstall at home in her beautiful old house at Hampstead. There was an air of rest about the place, which, at first, rather astonished than pleased Laura Ruthven. They stood still for a moment after entering the door in the great wall which encircled the house and garden, for the old place was a triumph of the landscape gardener's art, having been tenderly cared for, and matured by time. And the landscape gardener is the most daring of all artists, for he takes Nature herself in hand, and attempts to improve on her, and he even at times succeeds. The house, which was large though extremely unpretentious, was strangely old-fashioned: the rooms were low, the panes of the windows were not large nor of plate glass; the very furniture was so out of date as to actually be in the very highest height of fashion. When you looked at the old-

fashioned rooms, the old-fashioned furniture, and what some people would have called the antediluvian wall papers, which still, however, retained their pristine freshness, you wouldn't have been the least surprised if your hostess had welcomed you in a "set of hoops" or "with powder on hair and patch on chin;" the only thing in the whole place, indoors or out of doors, that seemed modern, was the mowing-machine which stood idle upon the middle of one of the great close-shaven lawns.

As the two ladies paused to gaze in admiration at this fair old-world garden, Mrs. Ruthven, indicating the lawn-mower with her magpie sunshade, remarked to her friend with a smile, "That seems a little out of place, Charlotte, doesn't it?"

Mrs. Walton laughed. "The turf's like velvet, Laura," she said; "it wouldn't be like velvet but for the nineteenth century abomination that you object to."

Beyond the great blazing beds of flowers

and the trimly kept gravel walks, with their box borders a foot high, which surrounded the house, came the old green turf in which the house and its flower garden stood as an island in a verdant lake. Beyond the lawns there were great raised banks of turf, and a curious stone erection with a balustrade which people used, years ago, to dignify with the title of an Italian terrace. At regular intervals on the balustrade of this terrace there were nine life-sized stone statues which represented the nine Muses ; but our English climate hardly suits the outdoor statue. Three of the Muses had lost their heads—the Muses have a tendency to lose their heads in this merry England of ours ; and the balustrade and the Muses themselves had been provided by Nature with a thick covering of grey and yellow lichens, tufts of yellow sedum and great stain-like patches of dark green moss, till there was absolutely nothing objectionable about the six ladies with heads and the three without who stood upon

the balustrade of the Italian terrace, and overlooked the charming old house at Hampstead in which Mrs. Tunstall lived. Can a headless statue overlook anything? That's one of those obscure questions, which, if one wants answered one must consult the Court of Chancery, say, in a friendly suit : that's an expensive business ; perhaps it will be better for us to do like Lord Eldon and "go on doubting."

The lake of verdant turf was bounded by a miscellaneous but well-arranged collection of forest trees ; they shut out altogether the neighbourhood and the neighbours, and that unpoetic place which may be aptly described as the region round about. You couldn't see the villas, you couldn't see the brand new desirable family mansions of the numerous business men who inhabited the neighbourhood of the great station at Hampstead ; and you couldn't see or hear, or in any way be aware of the existence of that amiable creature whom we all pretend to love so much, the British working-man. We pretend

to think that the ogre who must ultimately devour us—bones and body and all, resembles the pictures that are made of him upon illustrated tracts ; and, metaphorically, nothing gives us greater pleasure than to kneel down and kiss the ogre's well-greased boots ; but, as a rule, we don't care to see too much of him in the flesh. So, metaphorically speaking, we do what Balbus and Mrs. Tunstall's predecessor both did, we build a wall ; and our only difficulty is to build it high enough : and when we've crowned its summit with broken bottles of the sharpest kind we feel all the happier. Mrs. Tunstall had the wall ; there were also broken bottles of the most uncompromising sort, sharp glass that even the corduroys of the horny-handed could not have long withstood. But she had more ; she had her great belt of forest trees which effectually shut out both the working-man and the upper middle-classes : and so she lived, as it were, "the world forgetting, by the world forgot." The silence of the quiet sunlit scene

was suddenly broken by the vigorous piping of a thrush ; the two ladies stood as if spell-bound to listen to the unaccustomed melody.

"A pleasant place to live in, Laura," said Mrs. Walton.

"I'm not quite so sure of that," said Laura Ruthven a little sadly ; "to me it rather seems the place to end one's days in, and pass one's time in longing for release," she said, and then she sighed.

"Laura, you're morbid," said Mrs. Walton. "In my mind's eye, I can see this great silent garden and the quiet house peopled with guests, with friends and little romping children who would sport in careless gaiety upon the lawns. If man, or woman either can find happiness in this world of ours, surely, Laura Ruthven, they could find it here."

Then Laura Ruthven blushed, she knew not why, and then they followed the trim maid who had admitted them into the house itself.

If Laura Ruthven was delighted with the ap-

pearance of the house and garden, she was bewitched with that of its mistress. Mrs. Tunstall was a tall majestic old lady whose sweet face destroyed anything awe-inspiring in her manner and opulent physique. She was about fifty, "or by'r lady, inclining to three-score;" and had been a widow for ten years. Her face, somewhat ample now, but still shapely, had once been a perfect oval. Her eyes were large and bright blue; and the warmth of summer lingered in their glances. Except the wrinkles about the temples, which come to all, long before their climacteric, and, especially to those whose lives have been happy, and who have laughed more than they have wept, there was hardly a line in her face; and her thick, silky hair, once as yellow as virgin gold, now looked scarcely less beautiful—like silver gilt, with its intermixture of white. As to the old lady's dress, it was the plainest of all dresses, a simple black stuff of inexpensive material, but the simple dress was well made, and her collar and

cuffs were of finest lawn. She wore but one article of jewellery beside her ring and keeper, a small intaglio, the gift of her son : the onyx was an antique, the simple setting by Caslellain. But this dear old lady wore mittens ; they were in fashion in the days of her girlhood, and her mittens, like the rest of her dress, became her.

When Mrs. Tunstall spoke, Laura Ruthven thought she had never heard anything so soft and musical as her voice. It was not a low voice, although quiet, but rich and full ; and it was evident that it could sound a trumpet note if the necessity for command arose.

After some general remarks Mrs. Tunstall said with the license of an elder, but with a sympathetic interest that precluded all suspicion of mere curiosity, "How do you two enjoy living together?"

Both of the young widows were included in the question, but Mrs. Tunstall's eyes rested last on Laura Ruthven.

"I was never so happy in my life before,"

said Laura boldly. She appended a mental reservation, "but for one thing."

"And you, Charlotte?" persisted Mrs. Tunstall.

"As happy as the day is long," answered Charlotte.

"So I judged," said Mrs. Tunstall, "or I wouldn't have put the question. I wish I had two such happy looking girls for daughters."

You see Mrs. Tunstall was a widow too; and so she was not shocked at the avowal of her young visitors. She knew that a woman is happiest when she has her own way. A widow has no one to please but herself. She had loved her husband passionately; but she, too, would have said that the happiest years of her life were the last ten. We know why Laura Ruthven had no cause to look back with regret on her married life; and we have some understanding of Charlotte Walton's habit of looking at the bright side of everything. In the case of Mrs. Tunstall, the happiness of her widow-

hood was of the nature of a calm after a tempest. The fifteen years of her married life had been full of passion and excitement. Belonging to an old Warwickshire family—Mrs. Tunstall's maiden name was Landor—she had against her father's will married a wealthy iron-founder of Birmingham, who in his youth had worn a leather apron, and wielded a sledgehammer. At thirty, William Tunstall, except for his large hands and broad spatulous fingers, might, as far as refinement of manners was concerned, and in the matter of his appearance, have been mistaken for a member of the "caste of Vere de Vere." He had a soaring ambition; wealth was only a means to an end with him; and when he determined to marry, his wife was to be only a stepping-stone to the position he coveted—a seat in the Cabinet. Had he been a Liberal, the fact of his having risen from the ranks, and his gift of eloquence, which was considerable, might have ultimately secured him one of the Birmingham seats; but the central

idea of radicalism, government by majority, seemed to him so absurd—as it still seems, happily, to a few—that he joined the Conservative party. In connection with his change of opinion he made an epigram, which the Earl of Beaconsfield, then Mr. Disraeli, with his masterly and masterful power of annexation, incorporated in a speech in the House of Commons; and that was the furthest progress William Tunstall ever made on his road to the Cabinet. A very important factor in life which up to the age of thirty he had not considered, or had only thought of with a sneer, marred his advancement. When he looked about him for a wife, his eye fell on Miss Landor, and much to his astonishment he found himself honestly in love, and to his horror, for the Landors had been Liberals for a hundred years. A marriage might perhaps have been avoided had not Miss Landor, only a few years his junior, fallen in love with him.

A tall woman, if she be spirited and possess

some brains, has frequently a difficulty in finding a mate. Miss Landor experienced that difficulty. Little men with large heads and plenty of ideas, small purses, and attenuated limbs came a-wooing ; and tall men with small empty heads, and smaller, emptier purses, but with brilliant muscles and deep chests, also came ; but not until she met William Tunstall had her heart been touched. He had brains, he had ambition, he was handsome, he loved her, and he had plenty of money. She easily overlooked his want of birth ; and nerved herself to quarrel with her father. The quarrel was never healed.

Old Landor hated William Tunstall, not only as the vulgar thief who had stolen his daughter's affections, but as a turncoat of the worst type—one of those miserable, low-born upstarts, who change their politics in hope of changing their natures ; as if the Ethiopie could change his skin, or the plebeian his birthright of vulgarity. Holding such extreme opinions,

old Landor was never reconciled to his daughter ; and employed his influence, which was not small, in thwarting the social success of his son-in-law. After a month on the Continent, the young couple had settled down in the house in which Mrs. Tunstall still lived at the time of our heroine's visit. That William Tunstall should enter Parliament was the aim of both. Year after year passed in courting the great, in intrigue, in writing pamphlets, and making speeches ; until it became a standing joke, as well as a matter of wonder, that a millionaire of talent, whose ambition was to become a Parliament man, should never even get the length of issuing an address to a constituency. It was so, however. More than once the Charlton Club nominated him for a borough about to be vacant, but something always intervened to spoil his chance. Recurring chagrin told upon Tunstall, and upon his wife in a less degree ; it dug furrows in his brow ; it only whitened a few sheaves of

golden hair on her gentle head. They recruited on the Continent, or in America, and their love grew stronger as the fight grew more desperate.

Three children were born : the eldest, Meyrick, in the second year of their marriage ; six years after, a girl who lived only a few days ; and five years after that, a boy, who died in infancy.

William Tunstall died suddenly, no nearer his ambition than when he married, but still pursuing it undismayed. The strife over, the passionate, loving, fighting heart at rest ; after the anguish of the severance had worn itself out, there descended on Mrs. Tunstall's spirit a peacefulness utterly foreign to any previous experience of her life. Ambition she had, but it was for her son, and was purely vicarious, giving a zest to life without taking the flavour from all other interests. Her love for her son sweetened her existence, and her spiritualised love for her husband lifted it above the earth.

She would not have had her husband back if she could; he and she were both better as they were.

Let no reader dare to say that this is a novel with a purpose. Of course we have a purpose, but not in the sense in which the phrase is generally used. We intend to present as vividly as we can certain scenes and characters whose presence in our thoughts disturbs our peace of mind. Our purpose is to restore our mental equilibrium by getting rid of these in three volumes; and, secondly, to entertain in our modest way a fitting public. But if, in the course of these pages, any gentle reader, hitherto blinded by a prejudice that only recently fell from our own eyes, should be enabled to perceive that widows—Jean Paul long ago proved that old maids are as happy as crickets—that widows are not necessarily miserable, repining, insufferable creatures, but, on the contrary, often happier than most women whose husbands are alive, we

shall consider that we have not written in vain.

"I sometimes wish," continued Mrs. Tunstall, "that my daughter had lived, but it is best as it is, I have no doubt. Have you seen Meyrick recently, Mrs. Walton?"

"Not for a year, I think. Is he well?"

"Very well. Has Mrs. Ruthven ever met him?"

"I've never had the pleasure," said that lady.

"My son is the proprietor and editor of the *Dreadnought*—did you know?"

"I knew to-day for the first time. Mrs. Walton told me."

"Oh! Did she give you an account of his career?"

Mrs. Walton had not done so.

"Then, I can do it myself," said Mrs. Tunstall cheerfully; and with a *naïveté* very remarkable in such a self-possessed and dignified personage, who, in addition to being a lady to

the tips of her fingers, was also a woman of the world, Mrs. Tunstall took an easy position and told the story of Meyrick Tunstall from his boyhood onwards. Laura Ruthven experienced, what she had come out in search of,—a new sensation. It thrilled her with a very strange feeling indeed to hear this beautiful old lady talking of her son with the calm confidence of one who knows she speaks of what must be universally interesting. At particular periods in his career, such as university or social triumphs, she mentioned his name with bated breath, as if he had been a demigod in a distant, higher sphere, to which she might never attain, and yet with a sense of her maternity that gave a remarkable pathos to her narrative. When Emerson visited Rydal Mount, Wordsworth stood apart, and declaimed some poems to him like a schoolboy. Emerson felt at first inclined to laugh; but recollecting that he had come to Rydal Mount to see a poet, and that that poet was chanting

his poems to him, he saw that Wordsworth was right and he was wrong. Some such thought flitted through Laura Ruthven's brain as she listened to Mrs. Tunstall's story. Her son was her poem; she effaced herself; she was only Meyrick Tunstall's mother, the mother of the man who, she honestly believed, could move Parliament from his desk more effectually than the weightiest orator in the House of Commons; who could change the world's opinion in a fortnight, and alter the laws of the land at his pleasure. It was right that she should tell a visitor, with whom there was to be, at least, a lasting acquaintanceship, all about her son; he might not be quite so famous, or so influential as she imagined, but he was a distinct personality, a man of the time, and she had just cause to be proud of him.

Mrs. Tunstall made a very pleasant and interesting narrative out of the materials at her command; but her history of Meyrick Tunstall does not satisfy us; she did not know

everything, and laid particular weight upon his university honours and his social successes. Now, we trust we have accustomed our readers in 'our account of our heroes to something a little more characteristic than a list of prizes or a series of *menu* cards. Readers will have already detected the original through the thin disguise of an altered name, and we refer them to any of the biographical dictionaries of living celebrities if they wish to refresh their memories with the external details of the life of the editor of the *Dreadnought*. We have "metal more attractive"—to ourselves at least, and the reader may perhaps find it so too.

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